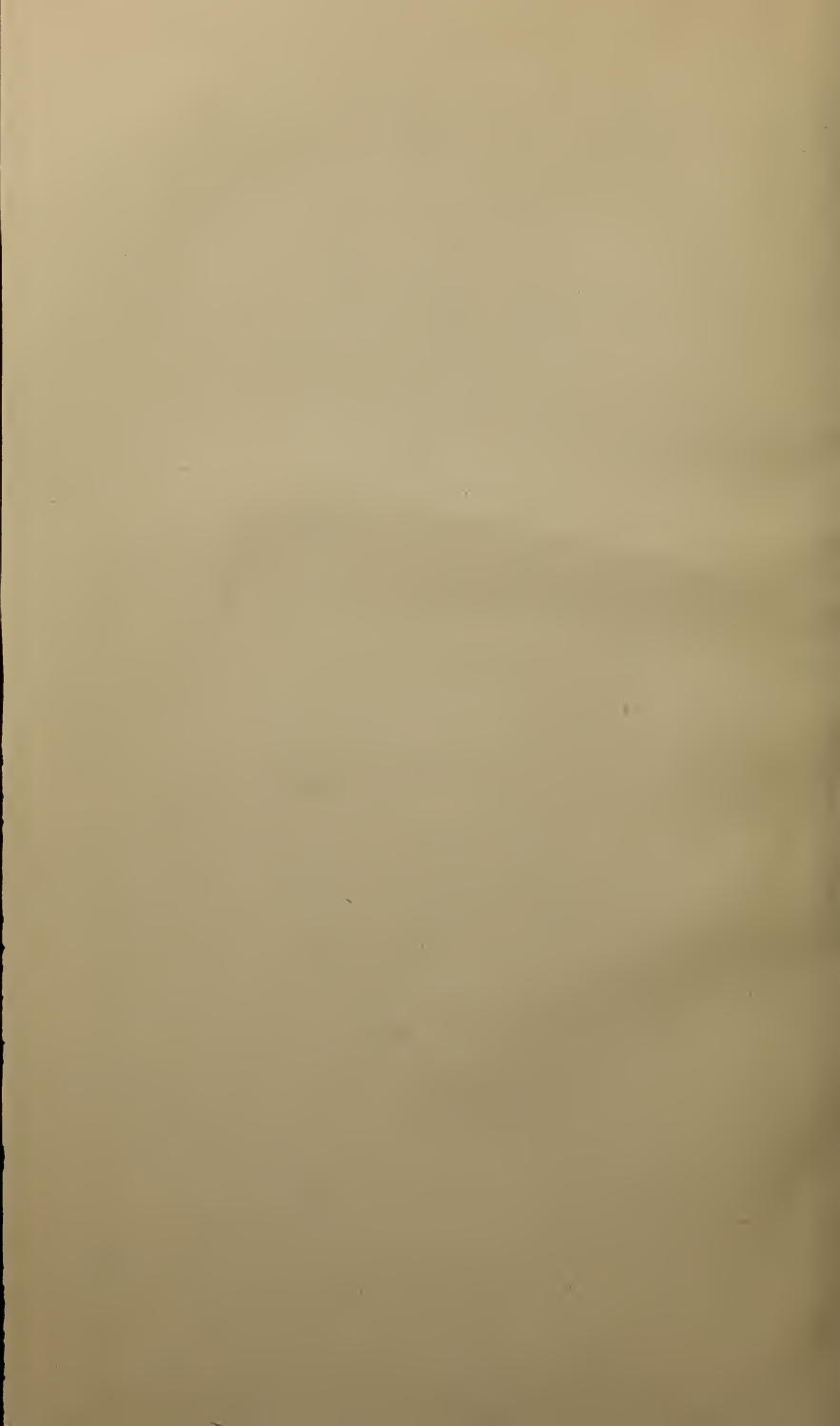






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THE MORALITY  
OF THE  
**New Testament,**

*Digested under various Heads:*

COMPREHENDING THE DUTIES WHICH WE OWE TO GOD, TO OURSELVES  
AND TO OUR FELLOW-CREATURES.

WITH

AN INTRODUCTION, ADDRESSED TO DEISTS;

IN WHICH THE CHARACTER OF

**Jesus Christ**

*Is vindicated against the Aspersions of Modern Unbelievers ;*

AND ALSO PROVING THAT THE RELIGION TAUGHT BY JESUS CHRIST WAS  
THE PURE RELIGION OF NATURE AND OF REASON.

The whole concluding with

OBSERVATIONS ON A LATE TREATISE,

INTITLED,

**THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE,**

WRITTEN BY DR. WARBURTON, BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER;

TOGETHER WITH

An Enquiry how far the Belief of any Doctrine may be necessary to Salvation;

AND SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE

ARGUMENTS OF MR. LOCKE AND DR. LELAND.

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**By a Rational Christian.**

*Reprinted from the 4to. Edition of 1765, and*  
**EDITED BY JOSEPHUS TELA.**

*Aliis nullus Deorum respectus, aliis pudendus.—Plin.*

LONDON:

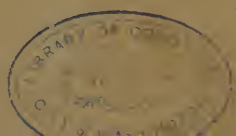
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## PREFACE,

BY A FRIEND OF THE AUTHOR.



To free the minds of men from *superstition* and *enthusiasm*, to expose *folly* in religion, to correct *error*, to inform *ignorance*, to detect *fraud*, to combat *priestcraft*, and to rally false zeal and false devotion, is the noblest work, the sublimest task, a man can be employed in, and will ever be worthy the labour of patriots and lovers of their country. The next amiable office is to inculcate *true knowledge*, *virtue*, *piety*, *charity*, and *universal benevolence*; or, in other words, to enforce the practice of the duties which we owe to God, to ourselves, and to our fellow-creatures, from the most exalted and rational motives. Now, this I conceive to be the intention, the benevolent design, of the author of the following Tract. But, before these salutary plants can be cultivated and improved in the human mind, it is necessary to eradicate and clear the soil of the above-mentioned pernicious weeds, when they have taken root therein. Before we can learn what is right, we must unlearn what we have imbibed that is wrong. The prejudices of education must be questioned, and submitted to the test of reason; the falsehoods embraced by

ignorance and credulity, sucked in by implicit faith, or planted by authority, must be purged off, if we would fully improve our minds in the knowledge of our duty,—if we would act like rational beings, and attain true happiness here and hereafter.

The author's zeal for *charity* and *universal benevolence* is so striking, and his warmth for the extension and propagation of these amiable virtues so ardent, that, if in some things he should be mistaken, yet he certainly deserves applause for the goodness of his heart, and for the purity and sublimity of his views: at least, he deserves pardon for the errors he may have committed in the execution of his plan. Men are but men; and, where their intentions in general appear to be benevolent, they are justly entitled to excuse, though some foibles and frailties should appear to be blended with their virtues, and mixed with their compositions. To err is *human*; to intend well is *divine*: to be perfect belongs only to *God*.

Men, endued with the faculties and powers which have been found among the species ever since there have been men, must have reflected, by contemplation of their own abilities and powers, and by observing the beauty, order, and harmony, of the universe, that there was an eternal self-existent Cause, or reason of the existence of all things; and that this principle was infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness. From hence must have arisen reverence, love, and gratitude; and these would naturally produce *adoration* and *worship*. Here we see the commencement of religion: but how simple, how clear, how



uniform! Could men, with no other notions than these, ever think of pleasing this infinite, all-powerful, all-good, and all-wise, Mind, by offering sacrifices to him? Could they think that *He* could ever be in want, who so profusely scattered his bounties around them? Could they think that the Giver of all things would ever expect any thing to be given him in return, but the pious ejaculations of a grateful heart? Surely no. Offerings of any other kind appear to be extremely unnatural, and could be the effect only of studied fraud and consummate artifice. Nature and reason never pointed out such absurdities, nor dictated any thing so very ridiculous.

Men's notions of *God*, and the manner of worshipping this *First Cause*, have been, we own, infinitely various, as we collect from the history of mankind: but this vast variety respecting those matters must have arisen from the craft of priests, the cunning of politicians, and the united efforts of designing men, who have, from the earliest ages, laboured with all manner of artifice and complicated sophistry to dupe mankind, for their own private emolument: for it appears to me, that the dreams of superstition are all *unnatural* and *irrational*, the work of study and contrivance,—not the offspring of *nature* or *reason*, nor even of *ignorance*.

By the same rational faculties, with the use of which men discovered that there was a God, the Cause of the universe, their Benefactor, the Giver of their being, and of all good things to delight their senses, relieve their necessities, and make that being happy: I say, by means of the same faculties, they

must have most clearly perceived that He could require nothing of his creatures but their *love* and *gratitude*, evidenced by purity of heart and rectitude of life; and that no other sacrifices could be acceptable to him. If they erred and strayed from the ways of their duty, they surely would as clearly have perceived that nothing but repentance and amendment could render them the objects of divine complacency, and restore them to the favour of their Creator. To suppose that he might be rendered placable by the blood of any innocent creature, is contrary to all our ideas of *propriety*, *order*, *goodness*, *benevolence*, and *moral government*. A *penitent* creature, and a *placated* God, are the clearest notions in nature: but to suppose a sinful creature obtaining pardon from God by gifts and sacrifices, Plato says, is downright *atheism*.

The vast extent and comprehension of the human understanding, of the powers and faculties with which our great Creator has endowed man, are most clearly and gloriously displayed in the discoveries which man hath made in *astronomy*, *geometry*, *arithmetic*, and in every branch of the mathematics and natural philosophy. After this, is it probable, as some philosophers pretend, that, through ignorance, mankind fell at first into the system of planetary worship, when they could observe that those bodies seemed calculated only to diffuse heat and light, and that they were circumscribed and limited bodies,—properties inconsistent with the attributes and perfections of *self-existence*? St. Paul was of a different opinion; for he says, that the Creator's eternal power



and godhead, his invisible properties and attributes, were clearly seen from the beginning of the world. The same apostle proceeds, and says to this effect—“The attributes of God were so visible in his works, that men could not choose but know him ; and, therefore, that they were left without excuse when they glorified him not as God,” &c.

Hence, it is clear the apostle believed that man did, at first, actually discover the divine attributes by the light of nature ; but that he afterwards suffered his reason to be greatly corrupted, by yielding himself up a victim to the delusions of interested men. It, indeed, appears that idolatrous worship, and blasphemous notions of God, were the corruptions and offspring of *priestcraft*, and not of *ignorance* or the want of sufficient light. One of our great poets says—

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———Superstition

Here fix'd the blest, and there the dread abodes ;  
Fear made her devils, and weak Hope her gods.

We have already proved that men, by contemplation and inspection of the order of the universe, might readily discover a First Cause, who, being *self-existent* and eternal, must be possessed of all possible perfection, and of course be infinitely *good*, as well as infinitely *wise* and *powerful*. In consequence, they must have perceived that he designed the good of his creatures ; otherwise, he would not have created them. From hence it follows, that they must have concluded that injustice, fraud, violence, the indulgence of exorbitant sallies of the selfish passions,

or any vice which would tend to lessen the happiness of mankind, must be contrary to his beneficent designs; and, therefore, that persons guilty of these could not be the objects of the divine favour; and hence, that misery must be the consequence of indulged wickedness.

Men must have observed, too, that *peace, ease, tranquillity*, and *health*, were the natural consequence of inflexible justice, diffusive charity, unbounded benevolence, and a temperate and regular conduct in the gratification of the passions; and, upon the whole, they must have concluded, that virtue and happiness, vice and misery, in the common course of things, were connected together by the wise Author of our beings: and hence they must have inferred, that virtue was agreeable to his nature, and that vice was the object of his disapprobation.

Natural religion teaches us, as is observed in the following Tract, that nothing can render offending man an object of complacency to the Deity but sincere repentance, and a reformation of life and manners,—an abhorrence of sin, and a conformity to virtue; and that by this alone a recovery of moral purity, in heart and life, can be obtained and evidenced. The *priest* might have told *repentant man*, that, his affections being reformed, his soul purified, and a thorough hatred of sin produced in it, he was become a proper object of the divine favour, and that all his past transgressions were forgiven: but this would have brought no advantage, power, or dominion to the priesthood; nor must the cure, by any means, be wrought without their assistance. The

balm of Gilead, which they pour into the wounds of the sinner, and which, according to them, is so necessary to his cure, must be a balm of great price. And, indeed, if there is no other remedy,—if the favour of God is not to be obtained without it,—who would not give up every worldly enjoyment to procure peace of mind, to assuage the agonies of a wounded conscience, and purchase a passport to everlasting happiness? Of what vast importance must a set of men be, who can do all this? What power, what dominion, is too great for such men to assume?

Now, one great part of the business of *Jesus Christ* was to destroy the *dominion and power of Satan, or Sin*, and to tread *idolatry, superstition, and priestcraft*, under his feet: but it is a melancholy truth, that his benevolent design hath not been attended with much success in these particulars: so much fraud and imposture have prevailed, that we know not what hath been palmed upon us for true, primitive, genuine Christianity. This pure system is so deformed and distorted from its original shape, that, if *Jesus Christ* was to return into the world, and to search the records of priests for his religion, he could not know it again.

Where it is acknowledged that such artifices were made use of, and that at a time when books were scarce, with difficulty come at, and could not be purchased but at a great price,—and hence, of course, could be but in few hands, and be examined only by a few persons,—we may well be dubious of the authenticity of those which have reached us. *Nobody*



*knows by whom the compilation, called the New Testament, was made.* But, by whomsoever it was done, doubtless the collection was formed according to the knowledge, taste, genius, tempers, views, and dispositions of the compiler or compilers, who adopted and rejected according to their inclinations, interests, and designs. However, it is generally allowed that there were upwards of twelve *gospels*, some say many more, which were current, and stood on an equal footing of authority for more than an hundred years after Christ ; and that the *canon* was not settled till after that period. To assert that those who compiled the New Testament were guided by inspiration, or that they were too honest to be corrupted, too wise to be deceived, too cautious to be abused, too disinterested to be prejudiced ;—I say, to aver all this, without knowing who the compilers were, especially as the compilation was certainly made in an age when imposture abounded, must tend to provoke ridicule, rather than to procure credence ; at least, with persons of judgment, who are not under the influence of interest. Hence it is clear that we cannot, at least, be satisfied of the divine authority of the *mysterious* parts of the Scriptures. This, I think, has been clearly proved in the conclusion of the following Tract. Our author has also shewn, in this excellent performance, that the *moral* doctrines of Christ and his apostles are agreeable to the nature and reason of things, and tend to promote the honour of God and the good of mankind ; that they contain nothing above our comprehension ; nothing mean, low, trifling, or ridiculous ; nor any thing contrary to our

ideas of the nature and perfections of God ; and that they carry in them the marks of truth, and the signatures of divine authority.

To inculcate the noble principles of Christian charity, rational toleration, the indulgence of mankind in their natural rights, and the liberty of judging for themselves in religious matters, seems to have been his benevolent and laudable design.

As a religion which sets the Divine Being in an odious light is worse than *atheism*, so a religion void of charity, and which is made the instrument of kindling hatred and animosity among mankind, is detestable *superstition*, and cannot be directed by that *divine* precept of *doing to others as we would they should do unto us*. That religion which, in order to favour itself, inculcates hatred to others, or which teaches any thing injurious to man, is certainly a false religion ; for, that God intends the happiness of his creatures, I think we may venture to assert. It farther appears to me, that no religion can be true which teaches that God can be pleased with any thing but purity of heart and rectitude of life ; every other way being inconsistent with all our ideas of infinite perfection.

No principle in nature can be clearer or more certain than this, viz.—that, if a Being of infinite perfection produces other beings, it must be with a view of communicating happiness to them, and not with that of increasing his own : hence we may be assured that God will require nothing of mankind, but the practice of those virtues which will tend to promote their own happiness.

Creation, or the causing of *beings* to exist, and all the operations of the Deity, seem to be the eternal necessary effects of the nature of God,—that is to say, of his attributes, attended with *consciousness*, or a knowing and voluntary exertion of them. As he has no passions like those which are found in *man*, nor any such wants as are incident to the nature of man, so neither could a regard for his own *glory*, *reverence*, or *honour*, have been any motive to his causing creatures to exist, or to his communicating to them powers and faculties capable of discerning his existence, and of collecting, from a contemplation of the beauty, order, and harmony, of the universe, his adorable attributes.

God has none of the little selfish passions of kings, princes, and governors, of this world, who are jealous of their dues, attentive to their rights, prerogatives, and honours, and who become peevish, froward, and out of humour, if they conceive that there is not sufficient respect paid them by their subjects. If some of God's creatures should be *unable* to perceive his divine, ineffable nature and attributes; or if some of them should never have heard of him; or, from their ignorance, or want of opportunity, could never be instructed in his laws, nor be made acquainted with the rules of his moral government; or if they should be deceived by those who undertook to instruct them, (provided they are not *slothful*, and *neglect* information;) in such cases, God does not become pettish and morose, or pour out the vials of his wrath upon them: nor is it consistent with our ideas of infinite goodness to suppose that he would become cruel and



inexorable, and, for their frailties, ignorance, or deception, resolve to inflict *eternal* punishments on his poor, weak, mistaken creatures.

“ If a frail mortal should have a numerous train of the most violent passions to oppose ; if he should be obliged to labour through the surrounding demands and allurements of selfish appetites ; if it should be necessary to subdue and overcome the solicitations of affection, when it opposes the dictates of pure benevolence ;” would it be at all extraordinary that weak man should become an easy conquest, and fall a victim in such an unequal combat : I say, if frail man, after a struggle in so unequal a conflict, should be overcome, can we suppose that an infinitely wise and good God will deliver him over to the malice of the worst of beings, to be eternally tormented, without any view of curing his intellectual maladies, of making him wiser, better, and happier ? which must be the case, if punishments are *eternal*. Would not such conduct have rather the appearance of malice and revenge, than of parental correction ? And shall we dare venture to ascribe it to the kind Parent of the universe, whose only motive (conceivable by us) for making creatures at all, was to render them happy ? — Surely we ought not to do this.

Man does not sin out of malice, or with a design to affront his Maker ; but from his ignorance, his frailty, and the violent solicitations of his passions, which flatter him with a false appearance of happiness, and dazzle his understanding with a delusive prospect of pleasure. As this is the case, an infinitely good Being will surely punish such a delinquent only in order to

cure his moral maladies, and restore him to virtue and happiness.

God cannot approve of sin, because it counteracts his plan of universal happiness; and he certainly keeps this benevolent plan in view, even when he punishes a sinner. It appears, indeed, as if God had necessarily connected vice and misery, virtue and happiness, together, in the nature of things, with the most kind and benevolent intention. In this view, the wicked man withdraws himself from and renounces his God, and thereby removes himself from happiness, and involves himself in misery.

Punishment appears to be a necessary result or concomitant of sin, and, consequently, a benevolent and amendatory means of approximation to happiness. This seems agreeable to our ideas of the nature and attributes of God, as collected from the display of them in the system of the universe.

If we suppose that God *wills* the happiness of his creatures, we must also suppose that he has this end in view through every part of his conduct towards them. Whatever revelations he makes of himself to his creatures, must be intended to produce general good and universal happiness. What he communicates must be agreeable to his own perfections, must be *intelligible, rational, and good*. If a *revelation* contains in it any thing repugnant to these signatures and marks of divine authority, it cannot be a revelation from God.

What can we think of a *system*, where God is represented as punishing one being with eternal damnation for the disobedience and folly of another?



Or what can we think of the goodness, the justice, the rectitude, and moral government, of a Being, who could not pardon sinners upon their contrition, repentance, and reformation; but required the blood of innocents, to appease his wrath and pacify his vengeance? Surely a *system* in which the infinitely perfect God is thus represented is repugnant to all our ideas of goodness, justice, mercy, righteousness, and moral perfection; and, though the other parts of it may be rational and moral, worthy of God, and productive of happiness, yet we cannot believe *these* to have the same authority.

From the metamorphoses which Christianity has undergone since the *advent* of Christ, have arisen various sects in Christendom, who hold different tenets and opinions, with regard to *revelation* in general, and to the religion of *Christ* in particular. These sects and opinionists may be reduced to the following classes, viz.—the BELIEVERS, the RATIONAL CHRISTIANS, the SCEPTICS, and the DEISTS.

The Believers are the bulk, and these swallow, without hesitation, all that is recommended to them by the priest, let it be ever so contrary to *reason*, opposite to experience, or inconsistent with rational ideas of the attributes and perfections of God. They are either *slothful*, or so engaged in the pleasures of the world, that they give up the trouble of examination to others; or they are *fearful* of trusting to their own powers, and of judging for themselves in religious matters,—leaving their eternal interest to the care of interested men.

The Rational Christians embrace every thing in

*revelation* that appears consonant to the attributes of God, to the reason and nature of things, to the good of society, and the happiness of mankind in general; and reject every thing that is *mysterious, unintelligible, or absurd*, as being *interpolation, corruption, imposition, and forgery*.

The third class are the Sceptics, or Doubters, composed of those who never boldly assert or deny any thing, but remain neuter, for ever floating in the duplicity and ambiguity of things, without determining either way; and considering all nature as incomprehensible, and *certainty* as not being the lot of humanity.

The fourth and last class are the Deists. These hold it to be impossible, in the nature of things, that any *supernatural* revelation can be made by God to man, consistent with the divine attributes; it being impossible for any man to prove that he is not deceived himself, and that he has no design to deceive others: for, though a man may be convinced himself, yet that can be no rational foundation for the conviction of another. To this may be added, that the Scriptures themselves have renounced all proofs arising from *miracles* and *prophecies*, as being liable to rational objection, and that they appeal to REASON only for the confirmation of religious truth. The Deists embrace the divine concession, and direct their faith by this *unerring* guide.

Our author appears to belong to one of the four classes of opinionists specified above, viz.—a *rational Christian*. The design of his most excellent Tract seems to be, to separate and distinguish between

pure and simple Christianity, or Christian morality, as it was taught by its great Author, and the adulterated, sophisticated, clerical Christianity, which has prevailed in Christendom, and which has elbowed and jostled the Christianity of Jesus Christ almost out of the world. He has endeavoured to shew that the true *sterling* coin of Jesus Christ has been adulterated by artful men, and that their *brass* has been palmed upon the world, and passed with the vulgar for pure gold: that superstition, and foolish rites and ceremonies, have been substituted in the room of *pure morality, true virtue, and genuine religion.*

The Christianity of *Jesus Christ* is one thing: clerical Christianity, or the Christianity taught by Christian priests, is another, of a quite different genius, nature, and complexion. The Christianity of *Jesus Christ* was *the love of God, and of our neighbour*; but the Christianity of the Christian clergy is, *assent* to incomprehensible creeds, and the *belief* of unintelligible doctrines;—a belief that *three* distinct consciousnesses may be *one* consciousness, and that *one* consciousness may be *three* distinct consciousnesses; that something besides repentance and reformation is necessary to the favour of God; and that this cannot be obtained without the blood of an innocent and immaculate Being.—The belief of these doctrines is insisted upon, in the *Protestant* church, as necessary to salvation.

Many of the Pagans objected, that the *impieties, absurdities, inexplicable doctrines, and incomprehensible mysteries*, contained in the books of the Old and New Testament, rendered *Christianity* so incredible,



that they thought it ridiculous to embrace it, and renounce their own creeds and doctrines, which were, in their opinions, more rational and intelligible. The doctrine of a *dying God* was rejected by their philosophers with disdain and contempt. This, and many other of the mysteries of Christianity, gave to the Gentile philosophers, and to so great a number of Pagans, such an aversion to Christianity, that Mons. Claude, a French Protestant refugee teacher, avers that, had it not been for the severe edicts of Constantine and his son against *Paganism*, or the old *Gentile* religion, three parts in four of all Europe would have been at this day Pagans. No wonder this should be the case, when one of the *Fathers* observes, “that, if the doctrines of the *Old Testament* were to be taken literally, he should blush to own it; the laws contained in it being far inferior to *heathen institutions*.”

It appears, from what has been offered, that, as the religion of nature and reason was corrupted by priestcraft and power, so the religion of Jesus was soon contaminated and defiled by the same means. Hence our author, in the Tract before us, has laboured to purge Christianity from its base mixture, to refine the mass, to separate the pure gold from the dross with which it is alloyed, to shew it in its native excellency and lustre, and to demonstrate how worthy it is of our regard and admiration when cleansed from the dregs with which it is incrustated, and under which it has been long buried. Pure Christianity is a beauty, which has been dressed up in the filthy rags of human invention; so that none

of her native charms could be seen, unless by the penetrating and curious eye. She has been so masked and disguised, by those who have pretended to recommend her to the world, that she has rather appeared a *whore of Babylon* than a daughter of the skies. Our author has stripped her of the ridiculous tinsel trappings with which she has been covered, and made her appear *simplex munditiis*;—the character of a true beauty, capable, by her genuine simple charms, of attracting the admiration of all men of true taste and genius. *Peace on earth, good will to men, the love of God and of our neighbour, universal charity and benevolence, and the doing to others as we would they should do unto us*, is the summary of the religion of Jesus. How short and full her apothegms! how sweet and enchanting the voice of pure and genuine Christianity! Good God! what have we now got in its stead!

The train of *piety, benevolence, sobriety, integrity, and sociability*, which runs through our author's performance, is very remarkable. His maxims are *honey* extracted from the New Testament, and the practice of them seems to be all that is necessary to promote universal happiness. His precepts and doctrines are not new in themselves—not of his own invention; but the precepts and doctrines of Christ and his apostles, recommended to our practice by motives entirely rational, set in a new and advantageous light, and such as must claim the regard and attention of all good Christians.

The ignorance and weakness of some,—the appetites, passions, private interests, and craft of others,—

will all conspire to corrupt the most rational, clear, and beneficent doctrines. The ambiguity of language will always afford opportunities for designing men to render the plainest truths, and clearest precepts, liable to alteration, to various interpretations, and a variety of corruptions. But what a field do *metaphor*, *allegory*, *criticism*, &c. open for dispute! what an extended broad canvass for priests to paint on, and draw a thousand scenes of absurdity and superstition!

Mankind have been thus corrupted by crafty and designing priests: Jesus Christ (as our author supposes) undertook to republish the law of nature, to restore *natural religion* to its primitive purity, to recall mankind to the use of their reason, and to expunge and banish out of the world Pagan and Jewish superstition, by the promulgation of the *Gospel*, which originally contained nothing but rational incitements to the practice of moral virtue; free from rites, ceremonies, and unintelligible mysteries, in which all other religions were then involved, and with which the religion of nature, and the law of reason, had been clouded,—nay, even obliterated,—among the vulgar. This was certainly an arduous undertaking, considering the prejudices, weakness, and bigotry of mankind, and how difficult it is to eradicate any established foolery. Yet, with a noble resolution, Jesus undertook the task:—but no sooner had he in some degree succeeded, than his followers corrupted his religion, and restored again the kingdom of darkness.

Perhaps it may be asked, What is necessary to reclaim mankind from their stupidity as to natural *theology*? The reply is short:—Enjoin, as *credenda*



in religion, only that there is one God, who distributes rewards to the good, and punishments to the bad, both in this and in another life : that goodness consists in universal charity and benevolence, evinced by *doing to others as we would they should do unto us* : that, upon a breach of these duties, the favour of God and happiness are only to be procured by repentance and amendment. This is the system of the author of the following Tract; a system of morals, which he hath recommended and enforced throughout his whole work; and this is a *broad foundation*, on which all religionists may stand easily together, without jostling each other. In a word, this is the system of a *Rational Christian*. As these principles are the foundation of all rational religion, and the only creed necessary to be assented to for the support and happiness of society; all other things should be left as indifferent matters, and be referred to men's own prudence, without any penal injunctions, either supernatural or civil.

Quakerism is, perhaps, the most simple system of Christianity that ever obtained in the world. The people of that persuasion are, or seem to be, among Christians, what the *Essenes* were among the *Jews*, as to their lives and moral conduct. Does not their *theology* answer all the honest ends which rational religion can effect in society, or for which it could be instituted? I believe there is more *rational religion, true piety, good sense, integrity, sobriety, industry, benevolence, charity, and brotherly love*, among the Quakers, than among any sect of Christians besides in the world, in proportion to their numbers. I

know it is said of the Quakers, that they confine their *benevolence* to those of their own persuasion. This notion has probably arisen from those large sums which, at their meetings, they collect for the support of their own poor ;—a laudable example for Christians of every other denomination ! but this, I know, does not prevent the diffusions of their charity to proper objects, though of different denominations in religion. Many instances of this sort I have myself been acquainted with ;\* and I must add, to the honour of the Quakers, that they appear to excel in that more noble branch of Christian charity, which *covereth a multitude of faults*. You will seldom, if ever, hear a Quaker speak ill of his neighbour. They seem to make a point of this ; and also of never depreciating any religious opinion, let it differ ever so widely from their own. Thus they do honour to the religion they profess, and become (especially in these particulars) examples worthy the imitation of Christians of every other denomination. That the Quakers are ready to extend their friendship, and to do offices of kindness to those who differ from them in religious tenets, I am

\* The Editor of this work can, from his own knowledge of many worthy Quakers, and personal acquaintance with them, testify several instances of their general acts of charity and benevolence towards those of different sects. It is no more than an act of justice, which he conceives to be due to the character of the Quakers, by naming one individual belonging to their Society,—the present Mrs. Fry, of St. Mildred's Court ; who, even at the risk of her life, visits the prisoners in Newgate, for the purpose of relieving the distressed, and improving their morals, though there is not one person of her own persuasion to be found there as a prisoner, for any crime whatsoever.—EDITOR.



myself well convinced; and the author of the following Tract has often assured me, that *his* experience has furnished him with the same opinion of them, and that he is in a particular manner obliged to one gentleman\* of that persuasion, who is requested to excuse this public acknowledgment of gratitude.—But, after all, the *Socratic dogma* and political principles of the Quakers seem liable to some exceptions, as the world stands at present.

The main end and design of *religion* ought to be the production of good morals, and the end of good morals the augmentation and diffusion of human happiness: but *priests*, in their artificial *theology*, have taught their disciples to quarrel about the means, so far as to sacrifice and destroy the end. If moral and religious institutions be not recommended to our observance, in order to make us wiser, better, and happier; for what end are they instituted? Yet, if the *means* prescribed prevent the end, do they not carry in themselves the marks of their own absurdity?

When we say, *Virtue* is beautiful, orderly, right, fit, becoming, prudent, wise, good, and the like; what do all these epithets mean more than that *virtue* actually conduces to the happiness of conscious, per-

\* Mr. John Gurney, of Norwich; who, though a merchant in very extensive business, employs a considerable part of his time in arbitrating differences, determining intricate disputes, and establishing peace and good neighbourhood, not only among those of his own religion, but also, and perhaps fully as often, among persons of a different persuasion. His capacity is very great, his judgment is strong and clear, and his integrity is so well known to be inflexible, that he has very frequent opportunities of thus expressing his *universal* benevolence.

ceptive beings? God cannot command us to do any thing contrary to our own happiness: the very supposition is absurd, because it contains in it a presumption that God may be *malevolent*; which is inconsistent with the nature of *self-existence*, since that implies all possible perfection.

If, then, it be impossible for God to command any thing inconsistent with the happiness of his creatures, shall we be so absurd as to take the word of a *priest*, when he tells us that God does so? Surely we ought not.

When the *internal* sentiment of a doctrine is contrary to the attributes of God, to the good of man, to propriety, order, and perfection,—not even oracles and prophecies can support its pretensions to divine authority; nor can the *belief* of thousands, their suffering, nor even their dying in the defence of such doctrine, carry any weight with rational and unprejudiced minds.

From what has been advanced, we conclude, that nothing can prove the divine authority of any *revelation*, but its internal moral excellence, its consonancy to the reason of things, and its tendency to promote the happiness of the creatures to whom it is made. *Reason* and *conscience* are the only guides to be depended upon in religious matters; and, if we renounce their directions and admonitions, we lay ourselves open to all manner of delusion, hateful to God,\* and destructive to mankind. This is so clear, that, when the *Protestants* opposed the corruptions of *Popery*,

\* See Romans, chap. i.

they appealed both to *Scripture* and *Reason*: but what a misfortune! they soon forsook their foundation, advanced a set of principles which destroyed the very spirit of the liberty they claimed, and began, in their turn, to punish those who would not subscribe to their creeds and doctrines.

Instead of this cruel and persecuting spirit, our author has endeavoured to establish *love, peace, charity, and universal benevolence*; to expunge all *mysteries* and *unintelligible doctrines* out of religion, and to reduce it to a plain brief system of useful morality; such as was delivered by Jesus Christ to mankind.

The principles of religion, necessary to promote peace, order, and happiness in society, are few, simple, and plain. As they stand in our Author's Tract, they seem to be all comprehended in the following articles:—

First, *That there is a God, who ought to be worshipped.*

Second, *That he rewards the good, and punishes the bad, both in this life, and in the life to come.*

Third, *That only repentance and reformation are required, to enable sinful man to attain the first and escape the last.*

Fourth, *That all morality is contained in the rule of doing to others, as you would they should do unto you.*

A late writer\* says, "Some, for what end I hardly know, have written against the religion of their

\* See Enquiry into the Life of Homer.

country, and, without substituting any thing in its place, would deprive us of it, for the pleasure of doing mischief." I would ask this gentleman, whether the substitution of the religion contained in the above principles, and the abolition of all clerical engraftments on this pure Christianity, would be doing mischief?

To root out all clerical impiety, to rescue Christianity from the impurities ascribed to it by interested men, and to restore the religion of Jesus Christ to its original perfection, by separating it from the unintelligible mysteries and gross absurdities which have been blended with it, seems to be the beneficent design of the following Tract, from which I will no longer detain the reader.



## INTRODUCTION.

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TO THE DEISTS.

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*Of Deism.*

GENTLEMEN,

To you, who glory in the title of *lovers of truth and free enquiry*, I now address myself,—having undertaken to vindicate the characters of CHRIST and of his APOSTLES from the false aspersions and groundless calumnies of modern unbelievers ; and to prove that the religion which they taught was the genuine religion of *nature and reason*, as it existed from all eternity,—the very religion that you boast of,—as being *more pure, more perfect, more clear*, and easy to be understood, than any other ; and, therefore, by you, styled DEISM, or the Religion of God, *written by him in the hearts of all his intelligent creatures*, and suited to all the various relations in which we stand to him and to each other.

*Of the Excellency of the Laws of God above human Laws.*

I readily agree with you, that such a religion can admit of no improvement ; that no other can be so

perfect and complete in all its parts, or so well adapted to promote the happiness of mankind; and that these maxims must be allowed by *all*, if they deliberate a moment, and consider who was their Author. What can be more perfect than the law of God? Who, besides the Maker of the universe, can be so capable of framing laws fit to govern it? who can so well know the wants and necessities of mankind as God, whose omniscient eye penetrates all nature? How easy must it have been for that infinitely wise Being, who made all things, to make laws which would always, and in all countries, answer the purposes of his government? It is, indeed, a degree of blasphemy to say he could not do this, or that his laws should ever stand in need of alteration or amendment.

The law of virtue is as immutable as God himself; and therefore must be the same at all times and in all places, and never can require to be repealed, like human laws. Human laws may be suited to different situations and circumstances; but the laws of God (which are engraven on the hearts of his creatures) are *universal, unchangeable*, and of *eternal obligation*. Now this cannot be said of any positive laws which have been established since the creation; and such laws cannot be universal, as part of mankind cannot be supposed to have been acquainted with them.

*All Men are bound by the Laws of Virtue.*

The laws of *virtue*, of *reason*, of *nature*, of *God*, which are all the same, have their foundation in the nature of things. The first man,—nay, the first angel, the first intelligent being that ever existed,

—was bound by these laws the moment he began to exist, and will be bound by them so long as he continues in existence: for, as they are suited to all the various relations which intelligent creatures stand in to God, and to one another, so, while these relations subsist (which doubtless they will to all eternity), no other laws can be necessary to answer the wise and beneficent purposes of God's government, or to promote the happiness of his creatures.

*Some Reason in all Religions.*

A religion dictated by God must be the most pure and perfect possible; and, as a proof of its being universally thought so, there is scarce *one*, among all the various religions now in the world, but has a mixture of this pure religion of nature and reason in it, though greatly alloyed by superstition and enthusiasm, by human inventions, and by “the commandments of men.”

*Christ taught and revived the pure Religion of Nature.*

I farther agree with you, Gentlemen, who call yourselves Deists, that the religion of nature and reason must be a religion which came from God, because it can easily be traced to its divine original; and the value of all other religions may be found by comparing them with this standard: but surely these are no reasons why this religion should not also be the religion taught by Christ and his apostles.

The religion of reason and nature, this pure stream from the eternal source of perfection, was almost

choked up by ignorance, superstition, and idolatry, (among the vulgar at least,) when CHRIST undertook to clear it of the rubbish which the Jewish and Heathen priests had thrown into it, that it might again flow, fraught with happiness to mankind: and this he did, by pointing out to them the obligations they were under to follow the dictates of *reason* and *nature*.

*The Morals of the New Testament are the pure Religion of Nature, and Christ is not the Author of its mysterious Parts.*

This glorious intention of his is what I shall attempt to prove; and I think it will not be a difficult task, because the moral part of the New Testament is entirely consistent with, and appears to be a perfect transcript of, the religion of nature.

As to the other parts of the New Testament,—namely, the *mysterious* and *supernatural*,—I shall take very little notice of them in this work, farther than to remark that they have not *the seal of God*, nor can they be proved to have the same divine origin: neither does it appear to me that our happiness or misery at all depend upon them, they being above the reach of our capacities, and therefore cannot belong to human nature.

*Mysteries are not for Man, because they produce no good Actions.*

The *moral* parts of the New Testament are those only which can concern mankind; as they clearly point out the duties which we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. Whatever interested



and designing men may have introduced by craft, and blended with the pure religion of Christ, or howsoever any adulteration may have been made, such corruptions cannot be allowed to be any essential part of his religion ; because such unintelligible mysteries cannot at all influence our conduct, or tend to promote virtue and happiness, which are the main end of true religion. That religion, which cannot influence the practice of man, cannot belong to man, however *happy* priests may have been in amusing mankind with words, and in making them believe that unintelligible jargon represents divine mysteries and sublime things.

The intention of religion, originally, was to make mankind good ; for goodness will, upon the whole, be productive of happiness : but a man may read, study, write, and argue all his life, about *original sin, redemption, faith, justification, sanctification, the doctrine of the Trinity*, and the like, without adding one tittle to the goodness of his moral character, or being induced thereby to perform one benevolent action. Yet it is certainly a man's *actions* that will constitute him good or bad.

*An unintelligible Religion is useless.*

A religion which a man, by the best use of his faculties, cannot understand, surely cannot influence his moral conduct. This is too clear to admit of a dispute, or to require illustration.

*Of Goodness.*

Goodness, at least in man, is a relative term, and includes in it the claims which God and our fellow-creatures have on us. There must be some exertion of a man's powers in promoting the happiness of others, in order to constitute him a *good man*, a friend to his country, and a benefactor to society in general. Such a character is distinguished in the strongest manner, in the Scripture, from that of a merely *righteous man*; particularly when it is said, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die," Rom. v. 7. If goodness, then, consists in the practice of the moral virtues, and is to be learnt from the moral parts of the New Testament, and from no other parts of it; this is sufficient to justify any preference which we may ascribe to the moral parts, and to excuse any doubts we may entertain about the other parts of the gospel of Christ.

*Christ's genuine Character.*

It is from the moral parts of the New Testament that we must learn the character of Christ. By these he appears highly worthy of our imitation; by these he appears to be a wise and good man, one concerned to promote the happiness of his brethren; and by these he appears to be one whose *justice* was *inflexible*, whose *charity* was *diffusive*, and whose *benevolence* was *universal*. Add to these virtues, that meekness and humility which he so much recommended, and for which he was so eminent, and you will have a sketch of his genuine character.

*Corruptions of his Religion.*

Whatever savours of pride, or of a lust of power, or of assuming to be equal with God, and the like, has not been proved to be a part of his writings, but rather to have been introduced, amidst the warm disputes with the Jews, after his death; at which time the prophecies of the Jewish prophets were turned against them, and were interpreted for them, by Christians, in a way quite opposite to what they had been taught to believe or assent to.

*Scripture Proofs of his not being equal to God the Father.*

I do not find that Christ himself ever assumed a higher character than that of a messenger from God; and such he might well be said to be, as he was employed in the republication of the religion of nature, which is the law of God: nor was it necessary for him to produce a commission immediately from God to claim the regard and attention of mankind, seeing that what he taught them was plain and clear, and had a natural tendency to promote their happiness. He refused the worship that was offered him, and directed mankind to the only proper object of it—his Father, the God and Father of the whole world: and in this sense he might with great propriety call God *his* Father, and direct us to call him *our* Father. He says to Mary, (John xx. 17,) “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” As to his assuming an equality with God, in the



sense in which we generally accept the word *equal*, I think it is clearly evident that he did not ; particularly from his conversation concerning the day of judgment, the knowledge of which he ascribes to the Father only : “ But of that day or hour knoweth no man,—no, not the angels of heaven,—but my Father only.” Matt. xxiv. 36. As if he had said, of this important day knoweth no man : therefore ye cannot know, nor can I tell it you, since even the angels of heaven know it not, but God the Father only.

Indeed, when St. Mark relates the same conversation, he does it differently ; for, after he has mentioned that neither men nor angels know that day, he goes on, “ No, not the Son, but the Father only :” from whence some have believed, that Christ speaks here of himself as the Son of God, in that peculiar and distinguished sense which our church supposes when she calls him *God the Son*. But let such consider that he ascribes the attribute of foreknowledge to God the Father only ; which appears to me to be a full and perfect confutation of that weak argument, namely,—that, as man, he did not know it, though he knew it as God : this, I say, appears to me, in this particular instance, to destroy the notion of that perfect equality with God the Father which some have ascribed to him ; for, though Christ is called *God*, he is never called the *Father* : and, therefore, if the Father *only* knew the day of judgment, Christ, not being God the Father, could not know it in either sense, and, consequently, in this particular knowledge, he could not be equal to him who knows all things. I mention this here, the rather to shew how



puzzling and uncertain every thing but the *morality* is, and how much it is out of the power of human reason to form any judgment about the *mysterious* parts of the New Testament.

Whether Christ was, in a supernatural way, inspired by God with resolution, steadiness, fortitude, wisdom, patience, and perseverance, in this great work—the republication and revival of the law of nature, human reason cannot determine: but this, I think, may be allowed, that, if ever God does supernaturally interpose to direct the actions of men, he never could have a motive for so doing more worthy of himself than to assist in the republication and more effectual propagation of that religion which he had originally planted in the minds of his intelligent creatures, but which, by the abuse of their freedom, they had shamefully neglected, notwithstanding the practice of it would have made them truly happy in this or in some future state of existence.\*

God is the source of all good; and, whatever tends to promote the happiness of mankind, is originally derived from him. That regard for the moral virtues which Christ taught, is founded in reason, and in the nature of things. The moral law is most certainly the law of God, and therefore the obligations to obey that law must be invariable and eternal: nor could it be made more obligatory upon us, whether Christ was supernaturally assisted by God in the propaga-

\* Indeed, according to Dr. Warburton, this might be done a much shorter way, namely,—by *internal impressions*. See his *Doctrine of Grace*, page 68.

tion of it ; or whether, like other philosophers, he, by study and application, by making use of his faculties in opposition to ignorance and enthusiasm, made the glorious figure in the world which he did.

*The Conduct of Christ most excellent.*

However, this must be acknowledged by you Deists, that Christ discovered as much meekness, patience, resolution, and perseverance, as Socrates, Epictetus, or even any one before or since his time. Yet I have heard some of you mention *his fear of death* as a blemish in his character : but I think this charge of imperfection in him to be without foundation. That he should shrink at the approach of death, and pray to have the bitter cup pass from him, is not at all to the prejudice of his character, and serves only to prove that he was *a man of like passions and feelings with other men*, though possessed of more virtue, knowledge, benevolence, and goodness of heart, than other men.

*Apology for his Fear of Death.*

But the most consummate virtue is not always sufficient to support human nature in that dreadful hour. Besides, the behaviour of persons at that important moment may depend more on constitution, and the texture of their nerves, than on their real virtue. You say, that Socrates appeared to die with less concern than Jesus Christ ; but you cannot make it appear that Socrates was a better man than “the man Christ Jesus.”

*Deists censured.*

I have heard, with concern, the character of Christ, and that of his apostles, treated with familiarity, and even with contempt, by persons who have called themselves Deists ; while they spoke of Plato, Socrates, Epictetus, and others of the ancient philosophers, with great reverence. Now, I apprehend that this can arise from nothing but the want of knowing his true character, or from their taking that for a part of his religion, which, in reality, had nothing to do with it. I do not mention this as a reflection on the religion of a Deist ; for I am well apprised that there are knaves and fools in all religions, and that even the Protestant religion gains very little honour from the lives of many of its professors.

The pure religion which Christ taught appears to me to be the same that God himself originally impressed on the minds of mankind, founded in the reason and nature of things, and on the relation which we stand in to him and to one another. Now, if this maxim be true, as I think it will appear, from considering the doctrines and precepts of Christ and his apostles, what are you Deists doing by opposing it ? It is like dividing a house against itself, and giving cause of triumph to superstition and enthusiasm.

*Deists should oppose Priestcraft.*

But here I would willingly check any rising vanity you may feel from supposing that these arguments are brought to prove that Christ and his apostles were really Deists like yourselves ; since they are only

designed to shew how easy it is for a Deist to become a rational Christian, without renouncing his favourite attachment to his "heaven-appointed guide" REASON. But, be this as it may, it is certainly your business, as well as mine, to level your batteries against superstition, enthusiasm, bigotry, and priestcraft. You should exert your wit and abilities in pointing out what is really a part of the religion of Christ, and what can be no part of any rational religion whatever; what must concern and influence the conduct of intelligent creatures, and what they can have no concern with, because it is above the reach of their faculties to form any judgment concerning it.

*Christ's Religion purely Rational and Moral.*

You call yours a rational scheme of religion: that of Christ appears to be so too. Why then will you depreciate the character of one whom you, if you are good men, must imitate? His religion was pure morality: you say yours is so too. Surely you should speak honourably of a person who lost his life in the support of that religion which you yourselves profess.

*Christianity without Mystery.*

I contend only for the moral parts of the New Testament; nor shall I endeavour to account for the introduction of those other parts which are blended with them. But that *pure morality* and *unintelligible mystery* should be propagated together by the same person, is hardly to be conceived. However, the general character of Christ will best determine which part was his, and which not.



*The Revival very necessary at his Advent.*

That a revival, or republication, of the religion of nature and reason was very necessary when Christ made his appearance in the world, will easily be seen by taking a view of the general state of mankind at that period.

*The Religion of the Jews.*

Whatever notions Moses, the Jewish lawgiver, might himself have of the supreme Being, it is evident that the ideas which the generality of the Jews had of him were *low, grovelling, partial, and imperfect*. Instead of believing God to be the maker and governor, the father, friend, and benefactor, of the universe, they vainly thought him to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,—the God of the Jews only; and that he had chosen them as his peculiar people, they being the descendants of his friend and favourite Abraham. It appears as if they thought the Deity were a *local, partial, finite, comprehensible, visible, capricious, and revengeful* Being, like themselves; that he loved only them, and hated all the world besides; and, from this principle, they were led to hate and despise all mankind except themselves. Charity and universal benevolence, those grand and essential parts of the religion of nature and of Christ, do not appear to have been inculcated among them, or to be a part of Moses's plan; nor does it appear that he impressed on their minds any ideas of a *future state*.

*Their Religion was Ceremony without Virtue.*

Their religion consisted principally in ceremonies, in which there could be no real virtue, in which the purity of the heart could have but little share ; and, therefore, it is not apparently stamped with the divine seal. The virtues of *justice*, *charity*, and *benevolence*, were in nowise influenced, or the practice of them promoted, by this religion.\* God was to be appeased and rendered kind to them by sacrifices and ceremonies, not by virtuous actions. In this ignorance of their duties to God and to mankind, in this dark and gloomy situation, the Jews continued till the time of Christ, who benevolently endeavoured to take them off from those low and grovelling notions of God, and exalt their souls to a more sublime and spiritual worship of the Deity ; and likewise to lead them to the practice of the moral virtues, which were more pure, more humane, more social, and more benevolent, than what Moses had ever taught them. And, notwithstanding they now continue the ceremonial of their religion, they certainly have more exalted ideas of God than they had before the time of Christ.

\* Plato, in his tenth Book of Laws, divides Atheists into three sorts, viz.—those who deny a God ; those who acknowledge him, but deny his providence ; and those who acknowledge both, but teach that the gods are to be appeased, placated, and rendered kind and propitious to wicked men, by prayers, vows, gifts, sacrifices, and honours paid to them.

*Moses's Miracles prejudice the Jews in favour of their Religion, and they believe him to be a divine Teacher.*

The prejudices of the Jews in favour of their religion were very great; which I do not at all wonder at, as they had the same external evidence of the truth of their religion which Christ gave of his: for the miracles of Moses, their great law-giver, must claim, with them at least, an equal regard with those of Jesus Christ.

The Jews were then, and are still, too fond of their rituals, and of the ceremonial parts of their religion: at least, they appear so to us, who are convinced that things of this sort are absolutely indifferent. But we should not blame them for this; always remembering that nothing can appear indifferent, which we believe to have the sanction of a divine command; which is the case with regard to them and their religious ceremonies. They believe that both the moral and the ceremonial parts of their religion were of divine original, or institution; and that Moses, their great prophet and lawgiver, was commissioned by God to teach them. This Christ himself never disputed with them; nor do the generality of Christians at this day deny the divine legation of Moses.

The religion of the Jews is allowed, by modern divines, to be the most ancient of any religion in the world,\* and to have been originally instituted by

\* The Abrahamic religion, which was different from the Mosaic, seems to have been the oldest religion.



God himself. Indeed, if they allow not this, they at once give up all the proofs brought from ancient prophecies of the divinity of the Christian religion; and then the boasted harmony between the Old and New Testament can be no longer asserted. Why, then, are the Jews unjustly treated with so much contempt by the Christians, instead of having, as elder brothers, the right hand of fellowship given them?

*The Christians' false Charge against the Jews answered.*

But Christians charge the Jews with obstinately sinning against the conviction of their own minds, and with crucifying the Son of God, *knowing* and *believing* him to be such. This is a heavy charge; but it appears to me as if they did not deserve it.—Let us consider this matter.

Is it reasonable to suppose, that this people could be not only weak enough, but mad enough, to attempt the life of a person whom they believed to be the Son of God, in that peculiar and distinguished sense in which our church believes him to be so?—namely, one armed with the power of omnipotence, and who could have crushed their whole state with a single nod. Surely it is not reasonable to suppose this, but rather that they had not sufficient evidence of his being the Messiah. They have, indeed, been told by Christians, that the prophecies of their ancient prophets have had their completion in the person of Jesus Christ; and that what they take in a literal sense is merely allegorical, and relative to a *spiritual*, not to a *temporal* kingdom. But this they still confidently



deny, and give those prophecies a very different turn.

*The Jews justified.*

I own I can see no reasonable claim that Christians can have to interpret, for the Jews, their sacred books, or to have a better understanding than they have of their own prophets. However, I shall leave those things to be disputed by the learned. Yet, God forbid that I should have so little charity as to think the Jews in general insincere, and that all their external show of religion is mere farce and deceit. Surely, we should think it hard to be thus censured ; and should imagine that we had a right, at least, to the milder and more candid epithet of being *mistaken*.

*Jews not designed to be converted to Christianity.*

I confess it appears to me, that God never yet intended the conversion of the Jews, in general, to Christianity, for this plain reason, viz.—if he had, they would have been converted : for who can defeat the intentions of the Almighty ? or what heart is so obstinate and perverse that God cannot turn it if he please ?

Besides, the death of Christ, the manner of his death, and the persons by whose hands he was to die, all seem, from the mysterious parts of the New Testament, to be parts of God's original plan.

*Of Foreknowledge.*

He foreknew that Adam would fall, and therefore he provided a remedy: so that, if the Jews had believed, Christ had not died; and, if Christ had not died, the redemption of mankind would have been unaccomplished; from whence they must still have remained in their sins.

Farther,—if God foreknew that Christ should die by the hands of the Jews, he also foreknew that they would not be converted; and, notwithstanding the prejudices caused by blind scholastic opinions, and disputations about foreknowledge and free-will,\* it is clear that, whatever God foreknows, that thing will certainly come to pass, as no power in heaven or earth can prevent it: and, though it be allowed that the foreknowledge of God may not influence the actions of free beings, yet it is a contradiction in terms to say, that God foreknows a thing *WILL* come to pass which *MAY NOT* come to pass; for, if it does not come to pass, God did not know that it would. This is certainly too plain to admit of a dispute; and it is equally plain that, if God foreknew that Christ was to die by the hands of the Jews, to have given them evidence sufficient to have converted them, would have been contradicting his own prescience, and acting inconsistent with himself. The Jews, according to this plan, were the instruments of salvation to the rest of the world; and are thereby entitled more to our regard and esteem, in a religious character, than any other people.

\* Warburton.

*Scripture Proofs that the Jews were not intended to be converted to Christianity.*

I hope I have said enough to prove that the conversion of the Jews to Christianity could not be intended by God, in the time of Christ: but, to bring proofs of much better authority to Christians, I shall turn to the New Testament, where it is written, and plainly relates to the Jews, or the crucifiers of the Lord of glory, viz.—Acts, ii. 7, 8, 11. “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew; for, had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” And again, Mark iv. 11, 12, “And he said unto them, unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables, that, seeing, they may see and not perceive, and hearing, they may hear and not understand; lest at any time they may be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.” From these texts of Scripture, I think, it plainly appears that the conversion of the Jews, at the time of Christ, was an event rather guarded against than intended to be accomplished; which, if true, takes off all blame from them, and entirely absolves them from the imputation of wilful sin, or obstinately resisting sufficient evidence of the divinity of Christ’s mission. But, farther, as I said above, if God did indeed intend the conversion of the Jews, what could prevent its taking place?

*Warburton's Effects of Grace.*

The conversion of the first Gentiles to Christianity, according to that celebrated writer, Dr. Warburton, bishop of Gloucester, was effected "by the miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit, in a sudden and instantaneous manner, rooting out in a moment the inveterate habits of vice."—See p. 68 of his *Doctrine of Grace*. Likewise, in p. 72, he says, "When, therefore, we see the deepest impressions of evil custom, and the darkest stains of corrupted nature, thus suddenly wiped out and effaced, to what must we ascribe so total a reform but to the all-powerful operations of grace?"

*Jews convertible instantaneously.*

Here we are taught by the good bishop's argument, that the obstinacy of their wills could be no reason why they were not converted, provided God intended their conversion. I know no reason why the hearts of the Jews should be more obdurate than the hearts of the Heathens: but, even if they were, surely no Jewish heart could withstand the all-powerful operations of the Spirit of God. The freedom of the will seems here, according to the good bishop, to have been, if this was the case, miraculously controlled; and if so, the same power could have effected the conversion of the whole body of the Jews, provided God, in his infinite wisdom, had thought it fit and necessary. Therefore, we may fairly conclude that their conversion to Christianity was not intended, at that time; and that evidence sufficient to have



produced that effect was denied or withheld from them:

*Conversion of the first Christians miraculous.*

Indeed, the good bishop above-mentioned says, in p. 72 of the same work,—“Nor could this sudden conversion of the first Christians be the effect of mere rational conviction. We know it to be morally impossible for REASON, however refined and strengthened by true philosophy, to root out in an instant the inveterate habits of vice.”\*

*We should have Charity for all Mankind.*

This argument, if applied to the Jews, tends to clear them of the charge of obstinacy, and of acting against the conviction of their own minds. It is, indeed, a very heavy charge; and Christians ought, at least, to be convinced of the truth of it before they make it: otherwise they fail in that virtue which the Christian religion holds to be, of all others, the greatest, and without which all the other virtues fade

\* If, as the bishop asserts, so thorough a change can be wrought in a man by the immediate operations of the Spirit of God, and that men may, in an instant, have their habits of vice changed to habits of virtue and goodness,—may it not be asked, why a Being of infinite mercy should ever make use of severe methods with his children? or why he should work a miracle to destroy a world, as in the case of the Flood, when another miracle, equally easy to him, might have made them all good and happy in an instant? Would a good earthly parent *drown* his children, when he could as easily preserve their lives, and make them virtuous and happy? Surely no. How, then, can we suppose it to have been done by God, *whose very nature and property is, ever to have mercy and to forgive?*

and dwindle into empty sound. Charity should incline us to think the best of every one, but more especially in *religious opinions*; because in these every man ought to be left to judge for himself. In this particular, we should hope all things for the best, notwithstanding appearances, and rest satisfied that every person has sufficient reasons for his own conduct; provided his opinions do not incite him to deprive others of their liberty of thinking, or giving the world their sentiments, on religious matters. We should always steadily regard, and constantly attend to, that rational, noble, and Christian principle, *of doing to others as we would they should do unto us*. This would effectually bar all persecution for the sake of religion, because no man would choose to be persecuted for the profession of his own. Our charity should be extended to all; even to those who are so ignorant as not to see God in his works, and who pay their adoration to idols instead of the living God.\* Thus much for the situation of the Jews at the time of Christ. They appear, in their religious character, to be entitled to our regard, equally, at least, with the votaries of any other religion.

*Of the Heathen Religion at the coming of Christ.*

When Christ first made his appearance in the world, the bulk of the Heathens were sunk in igno-

\* We are informed by Captain Cope, that the Peguers, even those who are clergymen, never enquire which way a stranger worships God; but, if he is *human*, he is the object of their charity.—An excellent and divine example for all Christians to follow, though taken from among the Pagans.

rance, superstition, and idolatry. Divine honours were paid to stocks, stones, and brute beasts; to images, the work of men's hands,—which had eyes, but could not see the distresses of their adorers; which had ears, but could not hear the prayers of their supplicants; which had hands, but could not stretch them out to the assistance, support, rescue, or delivery, of their deluded votaries. Such were the gods of the Heathens; and, *through the cunning of the priests*, such was the ignorance which had been propagated, with progressive and unhappy enlargement, from generation to generation.

*Difference between Christ and the Philosophers.*

The few philosophers among the Heathens, who had adhered to the dictates of nature and reason, and who could distinguish the true God by his works,—these saw clearly through the cheat, but wanted sufficient resolution openly to oppose the power of the priests, and publicly to discountenance the worship of their national gods.

This glorious task was reserved for JESUS CHRIST. He nobly undertook to combat the ignorance, and to oppose the vicious passions, of mankind; as well as to point out to them the paths of reason and virtue, from which they had most shamefully strayed.\* This

\* Were Christ living in the present day, and should he attempt to remove the gross errors and useless ceremonies which have been substituted for primitive Christianity in the church of Rome, in the same manner as he attempted to correct those abuses in the Jewish church, of which he was a member,—if he were not crucified a second time, he would, at least, be certain of suffering under the power of the holy Inquisition and the malice of *priestcraft*.—  
EDITOR.



glorious work he bravely pursued, though he had reason to believe that his life would be made a sacrifice for the liberties he took in reprehending his countrymen. And so successful and efficacious were his endeavours, that the power and influence of the priests began soon to decline, and their temples were no longer crowded.

### *Of the Progress of Christianity.*

This was the event in almost every country where Christ and his apostles made their appearance. The persecutions which they met with tended to the spreading of the religion with they taught; and their deaths established their pious system.\* The philosophers and wise men, before it was corrupted by priestcraft, embraced it as their own; and the ignorant soon found the practice of it to be productive of happiness. The very things which appeared at first severe, and opposite to their gross desires,—such as temperance, chastity, sobriety, charity, forgiveness of injuries, and the like, were soon found to be of great use to society. The peace of the minds of men, and the health of their bodies, were the natural consequences of the practice of these virtues, and greatly contributed to the spreading of the religion of Christ.

### *Why called the Christian Religion.*

The first converts, or disciples, called themselves Christians, as a mark of their gratitude to Christ, the

\* Monsieur Claude attributes the spreading of Christianity to the edicts of Constantine and his sons, and says, that persecution was the chief obstacle to the continuance of Paganism.



founder of this (according to them *new*) religion ; agreeable to a common practice among the disciples of philosophers in those days, of calling themselves after the names of their masters. Nor do I find any other reason for denominating the religion taught by Christ, the *Christian religion*. However, his system,—I mean all of it that may fairly be called his own,—appears to me to be no other than the religion of nature and reason republished ; that religion which God had originally implanted in the minds of his intelligent creatures, and which the wise men in all ages constantly practised ; but which the ignorant,—that is, the bulk of mankind,—had almost entirely lost sight of, owing principally to the interested artifices of their spiritual guides.

### *Of Priestcraft.*

But, if those deluders of mankind had taken as much pains to make the multitude *wise* as they did to keep them in *ignorance*, *idolatry*, and *polytheism*, ridiculous ceremonies, barbarous sacrifices, impious and blasphemous notions of God and religion, would never have been so general ; perhaps they would never have been at all.

This unhappy state of the world made the republication of the religion of nature very necessary. The bulk of mankind had been so corrupted as to turn their backs on the glorious light of reason, and were groping in the dark, taking that for religion which was really no part of it, nor had any connection with it, or with any part of our duty. The priests made great gains of the ignorance of the laity, spreading

the thick clouds of superstition between them and the light of nature; and would have wrapped them in everlasting darkness, if the refulgent rays of the Sun of Righteousness had not dispelled those clouds, and made way for *reason* to beam in upon their souls.

I wish there was no reason for fearing that the clouds of mystery and superstition might again gather, and darken the light of reason and nature; for the priests of almost all religions have now, as well as formerly, an interest in the ignorance of the laity, so far as relates to religion. They would willingly have it thought that God has entrusted *them* only with the key of knowledge; nay, that he has put *the keys of heaven and hell* into their custody. No wonder, then, that the world is still kept in gross ignorance, and is still oppressed with detestable superstition.

### *Old Rome and new, akin.*

The *most Christian*, the Roman Catholic church, appears to me to be much upon a footing with the Heathen church in the days of Christ.\* There is a complaisance due to the opinions of collective bodies of men, and more especially to their religious opinions; but, if any religion deserves to be treated with ridicule, it is that of the Papists, as now promulgated by

\* The Editor is fully justified in saying, that we have too much of the leaven of the church of Rome in the service and ceremonies of the established church of England, which shuts out many good, moral, and pious men from being teachers of truth and the genuine Gospel doctrines of morality.

their popes and priests, in which pride, vanity, ambition, and a lust of rule, have introduced superstition and idolatry; and these constitute the very essence of their system. The religion of reason, of nature, and of Christ, is perverted, corrupted; and the most absurd doctrines, established on its ruins, are supported by the civil power, and severe corporal punishments. I am sorry that I cannot find a corner of my heart wherein to entertain charity for the priests of this religion, who, unless it be a few that are extremely ignorant, must be insincere: for, instead of leading their flocks in the pleasant paths of reason, virtue, and happiness; instead of enlightening their minds, opening and enlarging their understandings; instead of pointing out to them the relations in which they stand to God and to one another; instead of explaining to them the duties arising from these relations, and shewing them that the practice of those duties tends to promote their happiness here and hereafter; instead of inculcating the divine principles of charity and universal benevolence,—these impostors do all in their power to keep the people in ignorance, and to lead them blindfold in the road of superstition, vice, cruelty, folly, and misery. This they do under the specious pretence of serving the church, which the ignorant multitude are taught to believe is serving God; and under this notion they engage them in most horrid and bloody persecutions, in which all the rights of nature, reason, justice, and charity, are violated, to defend perhaps only a *mystery*, a *ceremony*, or a *relic*. Thus

The Indians combat for the truth

Of elephant's and monkey's tooth.—HUDIBRAS.



*Priestly Cruelty is both odious and wicked.*

There is something in cruelty so opposite to our ideas of God, and so contrary to all our natural feelings, that some have thought even ignorance itself will be no excuse for it, and that persecution cannot be justified, though it should be the effect of sincerity and good intentions.\* However, perhaps the crime will principally, or in a great measure, lie at the doors of those who inculcate such wicked doctrines in ignorant minds.

*Religion without Charity is Diabolism.*

That religion which excludes charity for those who differ from it has the *mark of the beast*, and must be a bad religion. I cannot quit this subject as yet, but must pursue the many-headed monster a little farther.

That the doctrines of the church of Rome are diametrically opposite to the pure religion of nature and reason, is very clear: for, if we examine them, we shall find that the great design of the priests of that church is to deprive the laity of the use of their reason, in order to make them the more readily believe, and embrace, their absurdities: so that *reason* is excluded, as well as *charity*, as far as it is in the power of the priests to exclude it; which is another mark of a bad religion, or rather an abominable superstition.

\* If error be the consequence of sloth, it must be criminal. To renounce reason, and take the word of a priest, is not only a folly, but a crime. Sincerity, if the produce of sloth and ignorance, will not palliate and excuse the guilt of such conduct.



*Of Transubstantiation, Absolution, and Infallibility:  
all ridiculous.*

What can be more inconsistent with sense and reason than *transubstantiation*? What more ridiculous and foolish than to suppose that the priests have power to *forgive sins*? These two articles, one would think, should open the eyes of the most ignorant. One would imagine that this was carrying the matter too far; and that the power and influence of the church would be greatly entangled; if not quite hung up, in this enormous length of rope. But, alas! nothing is too absurd to be believed; nothing too unpalatable to be swallowed by ostrich-throated credulity, when presented as an article of religion,\* which requires only assent, and not a virtuous life. Gild it with the hopes of happiness; represent it as acceptable to God; or mix it up with fear of everlasting damnation, and it will go glibly down.

What can be more ridiculous than to ascribe infallibility to a human being, who, in some instance or other, errs every day of his life? It is more than ridiculous—it is wicked—to ascribe to a *man*, a *worm*, a creature but of yesterday, one of the incommunicable attributes of Deity. I doubt not but the Pope blushes at the thought, and, in his heart, disclaims all such pretensions.

\* Of this egregious credulity we have had a striking example in England, even in the present day, by the late Joanna Southcott's obtaining upwards of fifty thousand *adult believers* during her lifetime; and which, in all probability, was a much greater number than what Christ ever obtained or converted before his crucifixion.

—EDITOR.

*Of the gross Absurdity of Image-Worship.*

But, after all, what can be so ridiculous,—what can bring the church of Rome so much on a level with the Heathen temples in the time of Christ,—as the worship of *images*, *crucifixes*, and *pictures*? Though here, indeed, the more sensible part are ashamed, and tell you that “they only pray to Christ, to the Virgin Mary, and to saints, under the forms of crucifixes, images, and pictures, in order that they may intercede for them with God.” Just so did the Heathens: they also had their inferior and subordinate deities and mediators; for they held their superior deities as above attending to the addresses of such despicable creatures as they were.

But is it not amazing that, in this enlightened age, where reason shines out with such resplendent lustre,—where the knowledge of the *one true God*, in his moral character, is so well established,—inferior beings should be addressed as mediators? Here I must observe, how very imprudent, how dangerous, and, I may add, how wicked it is, to withdraw our worship from the only proper object of it—the one eternal God, and to give it to any other being, person, or thing, however distinguished, or whatever we may be taught to believe about them: for there is no knowing where such ridiculous and impious idolatry will end. A fear that the supreme God will be offended at our addressing ourselves immediately to him, is a sure foundation for idolatry; because as this fear will operate strongest in weak minds, so the gradation will be, from God to Christ, from Christ

to the Virgin Mary, and from her it will descend to saints “who never had a being,—or being, ne’er were saints;” from saints, to images and relics of saints, till we come to the lowest step of ignorance, superstition, and idolatry, and do as the Egyptians did formerly,—namely, worship *onions, garlic, cats, dogs, crocodiles*, and other vermin; and, as the Africans do now, adore serpents and other reptiles as gods.

*God only to be worshipped.*

God is the Father of the universe; more ready to hear the prayers and relieve the distresses of his creatures, than the most tender earthly parent can be to attend to those of his beloved offspring.

He made us, not to increase his own happiness, but to communicate happiness to us. Hence, is it possible that he should neglect the work of his own hands? or that his children should stand in need of any mediator but an upright heart, and the virtues of a well-spent life? If he who made us will not have mercy on us; if he who formed us will shew us no favour; to whom can we address our prayers? To whom can we fly for refuge in time of distress? Certainly we can apply to no other being with propriety.

*Old Rome and New equally corrupt.*

Thus have I lightly touched on the errors of the church of Rome; and I believe that all who judge impartially will allow, that a reformation is as necessary in this church now as it was in the Heathen temples in the time of Christ.



*The Protestant Church not entirely free from  
Corruption.*

But perhaps I shall be told, that there is *one* pure religion, every way consistent with reason and nature, and that no alteration can be necessary in the Protestant church. I wish I could think so, and be fully satisfied that none of the *old leaven* of the church of Rome remained in it; that it was thoroughly purged of all her errors; that it had no creeds, no sick-bed absolutions, no laying-on of hands, and the like; since all these are relics of popery and superstition. I should rejoice to find that, on the contrary, its doctrines formed a religion of pure morality,—a religion of *things*, and not of *words* and *ceremonies*; of the *heart*, and not of the *letter*; and that its universal *charity* and *benevolence* would always witness its purity. Christians would then no longer look on you Deists to be as bad as Atheists; and you Deists would cease to ridicule and despise Christians, for making those things a part of their religion, which, in fact, can be no essential part of any true religion. I say, it appears to me that the Protestant church would be more pure, if creeds, absolutions, laying-on of hands, and the like, were left out of its service. But, perhaps, the whole bench of bishops think it best that it should remain as it is; and I give up the point.

*The Deists censured again.*

You Deists have been exerting your wit in depreciating the characters of Christ and of his apostles,



and in opposing doctrines in the New Testament which are really no part of the religion of Christ : whilst, on the other hand, Christian writers have been exhausting their erudition in defence of tenets, which, upon the whole, are not defensible on any principles of reason or common-sense.

*The Gospel worthy of God.*

I would gladly reconcile all the contending parties, by proving the genuine morality of the New Testament to be a correct transcript of the law of nature ; and by demonstrating it to be a system of morals worthy of having God for its author, worthy of having Christ for its republisher, and worthy of the regard of every rational being.

*Learning not necessary to understand the Gospel.*

If any considerable degree of learning had seemed to me necessary to this end, I should never have undertaken it ; but pure morality will always be on a level with common sense. The unlearned are as much concerned in it as the learned. It is the same in all languages, in all places, and at all times : the practice of it is required universally, without distinction ; and therefore all paraphrases, all commentaries, all explanations of the Scriptures, would be superfluous and unnecessary, if the moral parts only were regarded. Indeed, it appears to me that a rule given for *universal use* by a Being of infinite wisdom can never want explanation.

## INTRODUCTION.

### *Arts of Divines, as to Scripture.*

Many of the other parts of the New Testament are above the reach of our capacities : some passages are difficult to be understood ; and some appear, to unlearned men, to contradict one another. To reconcile these, divines tell us, that some passages must be taken *literally*, and some *allegorically* ; while some are said to be translated wrong, and to have a different meaning in the Greek language, from what is given them in the vulgar tongue. But this cannot be said of the purely moral parts, which are so plain that “ he who runs may read ” them.

### *Mysteries enforce no Obligation.*

How can duties be of universal obligation, if they are not universally understood ? How can God require, of the illiterate and unlearned, the practice of duties which none but the learned understand ?\* Such demands and exactions are inconsistent with all our ideas of an infinitely perfect and good Being. A person cannot be bound by any law which is out of his power to understand. An ideot, for this reason, is bound by no human law. Now we are all upon the footing of ideots with regard to the mysterious and unintelligible parts of the New Testament.

\* And even the learned of every age and country do not appear to understand the true meaning of the mysterious parts of the religious duties and obligations, as contained in the New Testament, which they profess to believe ; since they are continually quarrelling, and disputing with and contradicting each other, from age to age.—  
EDITOR.

The law of *nature* is universally understood, so far as to constitute a rule “perfect in its direction for the conduct of human life;” and is, therefore, of universal and eternal obligation.

*The Deists censured for ridiculing the Gospel.*

I am, in a particular manner, willing to convince you, Deists, how very improper and absurd it is for you to ridicule and depreciate the character of Him who lost his life in the cause of reformation, virtue, and true religion. The religion of Christ, *unadulterated*, is pure morality: now the practice of morality has a direct tendency to promote the happiness of society, by making better fathers, better husbands, better wives, better children, better servants, better subjects, better masters; in short, a strict attachment to it will exalt human nature to that glorious height which God, the maker of the universe, intended it should attain. You cannot, upon your own principles, be enemies to morality. You believe there was such a person as Jesus Christ, and that he taught morality to mankind: nay, some of you have gone so far as to say that you believed him to have been a Deist. How inconsistent, then, is it for you to endeavour to depreciate his character!

*Whether Christianity be Morality.*

But, after all, perhaps I may be told, by Roman Catholic Christians, Protestant Christians, and also by you Deists, that I am quite mistaken in the religion of Christ, and that morality was the least part of it: that he required much more than mere mo-

rality to render us acceptable to God. Let this be proved, as well as asserted, and then I shall yield my assent, and give up the point. In the mean time, I cannot be styled an enemy to Christ, or to Christianity, for endeavouring to prove what the greatest advocates for Christianity have asserted; namely,—that the religion of Christ produces the noblest and most perfect system of morality that any religion can boast of.

*The Author a Friend to Deists and to all Mankind.*

I cannot surely be accounted an enemy to you, Deists, for endeavouring to make it appear that the religion of Christ and the religion of nature are the same: neither can I be justly thought an enemy to mankind in general, for reminding them of the duties which they owe to God, to themselves, and to their fellow-creatures; because the practice of those natural and reasonable duties will tend to promote their happiness, both here and hereafter. If any are displeased, it can be only *the silversmiths of the great Diana*, whose craft may suffer, and whose power may be diminished, by the establishment of pure religion, untainted with worldly interest, and unadulterated with useless ceremonies and unintelligible mysteries. Be this as it may; I am enlisted under the banner of truth, and will stand up in her defence, or fall an honourable victim in her glorious cause.



*The Author's Motives for Writing must be approved  
by the Honest.*

The love of truth, of liberty, and of free enquiry, is my motive for writing ; being conscious that, while these prevail, *ignorance, enthusiasm, superstition, and priestcraft*, will hide their heads ; persecution on account of religion will every where be discouraged ; and *patience, justice, charity, and benevolence*, will universally abound.

My *intention* must certainly be approved by the wise, the virtuous, and the honest. However, I wish my capacity for doing good, in this or any other way, were equal to the love I bear to mankind, which, I can truly say, is universal and unbounded.

*Difference of Opinion no Bar to Charity for all  
Mankind.*

Difference in sentiment cannot be avoided ;\* nor is such difference at all inconsistent with that affection for one another which nature and reason require. But, however we may differ in opinions, let us love one another as brethren, and strive to excel in those virtues which will recommend us to God, *who is good to ALL, and whose tender mercies are over ALL his works.*

I am, &c.

THE AUTHOR.

\* Unity of opinion is a thing morally impossible in nature. Were all mankind of the same opinion to-day, to-morrow they would think differently, from seeing the same objects in a different point of view.—EDITOR.



# BOOK I.

CONTAINING

THE DUTIES WHICH WE OWE TO GOD.

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## Chap. I.

OF THE BEING OF GOD.

ROM. I. from the 20th to the 24th verse.—For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God; neither were they thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

THIS article does not strictly appertain to morality; but, as it is the ground-work and foundation of it, I hope I shall be excused for beginning with some thoughts on the Being of God, and of his production of other beings; from which we shall naturally be led to admire, adore, and love, the first and last, the infinitely greatest, and best, of Beings.

The Jews, to whom Christ and his apostles first addressed themselves, were already believers of the existence of God, though their notions of him were low and imperfect. The Heathens also believed the existence of superior beings, but had the most un-

natural and unreasonable sentiments concerning them : so that the business of Christ and of his apostles was, it seems, principally to give both Jews and Heathens more just and worthy notions of the Supreme Being : this being the proper foundation for true religion,—the religion they were about to teach. Hence, if they had multiplied arguments to prove the existence of God, such arguments would have been superfluous and unnecessary. Accordingly, I find but one made use of upon this topic in the New Testament,—namely, that which I have produced above. This is the strongest and most natural that could be introduced, it being drawn from the visible objects around us. St. Paul seems so conscious of the force of this argument, that he charges the Romans with a crime for not worshipping the true God, although he had so clearly revealed himself to them in his works. St. Paul's reasoning agrees exactly with the reasoning of those philosophers who had steadily adhered to the light of nature. In every object which they contemplated, they could perceive an exertion of infinite power and wisdom ; and they were convinced that, without the concurrence of such almighty power, nothing could have been produced. But a consideration of their own beings, and the manner of their own production, led them directly to a First Cause ; for, how far soever their ideas might be carried back in a train of successive generation, or of effects and causes relative to the existence of man, yet it is clear, in the issue, that there must be a beginning of human generation ; and their ideas must stop at an original pair, formed and impressed



so as to produce their kind, in the way they are now produced, in order to people this new little world, which perhaps succeeded the destruction of some former system, among the numberless ones which eternal power had before produced. *Formed and impressed*—by whom? The very next step confesses a God, and infinite perfection closes the scene of their enquiry.

Thus did the philosophers of old find,—thus do we find,—that we are the production of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. But let not pride take place in our hearts on this account; for the meanest reptile has as much to boast.

Let us not think that we are the most ancient, or most noble, of the works of God. This world is very little, compared to others within the reach of our observations; but probably there may be millions of millions of other systems and worlds, which have never reached the knowledge of us mortals; and our world, in comparison of others, may be but of yesterday. God is from eternity, and the display of his goodness must consequently be from eternity. The lowest and most grovelling idea we can have of a God of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, is—that there was a time when he *began to create!* but, if there was a time when he *began* to create, there must be an eternity before. To suppose a time when God began to create, is to suppose that the infinitely benevolent and merciful Deity had been eternally inactive, contemplating his own perfections, what he was, and what he could do; possessed of every requisite for the communication of happiness to an

infinite number of beings, but without doing any thing. Such notions destroy at once all our ideas of his attributes. Infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, must be active, or not be at all. We have no ideas of the terms, if we do not suppose them to be exerted ; and, to suppose a Being eternally possessing these attributes, and not exerting them, is having the most unworthy idea of him, if it does not actually amount to a complete contradiction.

On the contrary, what an illustrious idea is it of the divine perfections to suppose all this vast and endless concatenation of beings and things to have been *eternally* proceeding from God, their source ; and that every world which he has made is as replete with delegated bliss as it is possible for it to be, consistent with the attributes of God and the established order of things. To maintain the contrary of all this is to make God a malevolent Being, which is *worse* than Atheism.

To strengthen this argument, I shall here make an extract from one of Mr. Bourn's excellent Discourses on the Evidences of Natural Religion and the Christian Revelation, published in 1760, by R. Griffiths : —“ Before the breath of life inspired our first progenitor, before the mountains were brought forth, or the soil of the earth was formed ; before the rivers flowed, and the ocean filled the spacious cavities of the earth, *from everlasting there was God*,—the first and only Potentate, who holds immortality, life, and existence, in himself,—whose wisdom, goodness, and power, were without a beginning, the same in the past eternity, and will be the same without end.

“ In revolving backwards the interminable series of ages past, before this world was made, can we ever come to a period when there were no creatures existing,—nothing but the sole, self-sufficient Deity? Were there not always worlds and systems without number, peopled with myriads of intelligent beings, beholding the glory, and rejoicing in the goodness, of their Creator? Could infinite Wisdom ever exist, with no designs in execution? Could almighty Power ever lie dormant and inactive? Could exuberant Goodness ever be barren and unprofitable; and the Fountain of all life and good send forth no streams of beneficence? The works of Almighty God are now, ever were, and ever will be, adequate to the inexhaustible plenitude and absolute perfection of his own nature.

“ But, if the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of Deity never were, in any age of past eternity, inactive or unbeneficent, it follows that there may be exalted spirits now existing in a glorious state, who are not of yesterday like ourselves, but who have been from millions of ages, and who may not be able themselves to trace back their own existence, through so vast antiquity, to the remote beginning; who, nevertheless, may at first have inhabited a world, and animated bodies similar to our own; and, having acquired virtue, and passed the trials of life and death, became the proper objects of divine favour, and arose to glory and immortality.”—*Discourse ix. vol. 1.*

The philosophers of old might probably reason in this manner; and, by contemplating the works of



creation, they were naturally led to believe the BEING OF GOD; and, by farther contemplating the beauty, the harmony, the grandeur, the simplicity, the uniformity, and variety, of the works of God, and how they were calculated to promote the happiness of man, they justly concluded also that God must be a *good* Being, that he delighted in goodness, and that goodness must be productive of happiness.

The argument which Mr. Addison puts into the mouth of Cato is extremely beautiful and natural, and shews that it was also his opinion that the Being and Attributes of God were discoverable by the light of nature. I shall be excused for transcribing here part of that celebrated speech :—

—————If there's a Power above us,  
(And that there is, all nature cries aloud  
Through all her works,) he must delight in virtue;  
And that which he delights in must be happy.

The power and wisdom of a First Cause were seen in the grandeur, magnificence, and regularity of the works of creation; and his goodness was known, from those works being adapted to promote the happiness of his creatures.

The light of nature taught them, that God was the Father of the universe, and that he produced beings to make them happy: therefore, the warmest returns of gratitude were his due. The light of nature also taught them, that, as children of the same Father, all mankind must be brethren; and, as God intended to make us *all* happy, so we should do all in our power to carry on this infinitely benevolent plan.



I hope that I shall be excused for this short digression from my subject ; as the relation we stand in to God, and to one another, so naturally arose out of the arguments brought to prove his existence.

To proceed then.—The being and attributes of God appear to have been known to the philosophers and sages of antiquity ; and that only seems to have been *unknown to them*, which is also *unknown to us*, and must ever remain so,—namely, the mode and place of his existence ; the knowledge of which is either unnecessary or else could not be revealed to such creatures as we are, who cannot comprehend or have any idea of *spirit*. Indeed, it appears to me that all our enquiries of this kind are useless. This thought is finely expressed by Job, (xi. 7,) “ Canst thou, by searching, find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?”—which expression certainly relates to the mode and place of God’s existence. It was in this sense that God was *unknown* to those sages of antiquity ; and to this unknown God, I doubt not but one or other of them erected the famous altar which St. Paul took so much notice of, and attributed to the superstition of the Athenians ; but in this I cannot help thinking there was some mistake. An altar, with such an inscription, could hardly be set up by the priests of that country, because it rather tended to destroy superstition, and subvert their power and influence, than to establish either. Their gods were local, their names and temples publicly known ; and their priests strove who should gain the greatest number of profitable votaries. This altar, then, must surely have been erected

by some philosopher to the One True God, who was known by the effects of his infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, but unknown as to the mode and place of his existence. The One True God (whom we now adore) was neither known nor worshipped by the ignorant, deceived, Heathen multitude; neither was he *ignorantly* worshipped by philosophers: for they might, and every one who exercises his reason in the enquiry may, from the works of creation, trace out the Being and Attributes of God.

## Chap. II.

### OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD: PURE AND SPIRITUAL WORSHIP ONLY ACCEPTABLE.

ACTS, xvii. 24, 25.—He dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is he worshipped with men's hands, as though he needeth any thing, seeing he giveth to all life and breath, and all things.

JOHN, iv. 24.—God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

God is a spirit, and requires of us pure and spiritual worship. He is not to be worshipped with men's hands; that is to say, not by sacrifices and oblations,—not by forms and ceremonies,—not by fastings, penances, stripes, and the like,—but with sincerity of heart: and this doctrine is exactly conformable to the opinion of the Heathen sages. They well knew, from the works of creation, that the one true God was not a material Being like themselves, but that he

was immense and omnipresent, and not to be circumscribed by the narrow bounds of a temple; as were the idol gods, which the vulgar Heathens worshipped. They knew that the worship pleasing to him must be pure and spiritual, and must flow from a good and upright heart. They knew, from the light of nature, that forms and ceremonies were not of the essence of true devotion; and that the religion which had least of these was likely to be the most pure and spiritual, and, of course, most acceptable to an infinitely pure Spirit.

### Chap. III.

#### OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

MATT. xviii. 20.—For where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.

HEBREWS, x. 25.—Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.

FROM the first of the above texts, and likewise, perhaps, with a view of inspiring persons with reverence, and rendering their public devotions more pure and spirited, most divines, who have written on this subject, have represented God as being more immediately present in religious assemblies. This opinion is not only unphilosophical, but injurious to the character of an immense Spirit, who fills the universe, who is every where present, who is extended throughout all extent, who pervades and supports every thing, and who cannot possibly be more in one place

than in another. If just and proper notions of God are the proper foundations of true religion, wrong notions of God must always be injurious to man, as they may lay the foundation of a false religion. How far Moses, the great lawgiver of the Jews, can be justified for representing the eternal immense Spirit as being locally present in the camp of the Israelites, is not my business here to enquire: yet it is generally believed that this notion of a *local Deity* was the foundation of all the idolatry that ever took place in the world.

The propriety and utility of public worship may readily be made appear, without introducing an opinion which derogates so much from the honour of God, and which is fraught with so much mischief to mankind.

External public worship is a duty which we owe to God; as it is a public acknowledgment of our belief in, and dependance on, him. It tends to make piety more universal, from the influence of example: and if piety be a virtue, as it most certainly is, then it is fit that it should universally prevail. Examples are often more prevalent than precepts: and hence the *practice* of piety is the most powerful recommendation of it, and tends to affect the heart more, perhaps, than lectures of morality.

These are sufficient reasons why we should attend the public worship of God, without having recourse to any thing so strained and unnatural as the supposition of God's being more immediately present in our churches and places of public worship: nay, if



we attend to the actions of some of the priests, we may fairly suppose that they imagine, not only that God is more immediately present in the church, but that he is more immediately present in a particular part of the church: else whence all those turnings and bowings to the altar, which border so nearly on Popish idolatry. Weak minds are much hurt by such practices as these: for they are led to believe that there is somewhat of the essence of true devotion in those things, when, alas! nothing can be more distinct from that pure and spiritual worship which alone is pleasing to God.

## Chap. IV.

### OF PRIVATE WORSHIP.

MATT. vi. 6.—But, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and, when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will reward thee openly.

MATT. xiv. 23.—And, when he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray; and, when the evening was come, he was there alone.

ACTS, x. 9.—On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up to the house-top to pray.

HERE we see that private worship is commanded by Christ, and is also recommended by his own example, and the example of the apostle Peter. Though public worship be also recommended in the New Testament, and very consistent with reason and nature, yet to me there appears to be many advantages attending private worship.

When a man enters into his closet to pray, he

seems to be more collected and retired within himself, and his sole business seems to be to recommend himself to God. His devotions are less interrupted by earthly objects, and are generally more pure, and less liable to insincerity ; because they are not calculated to raise the esteem or admiration of mankind, or to answer any worldly ends. There is nothing to call off his attention. It is entering, as it were, into a private conference with God ; and it hath always appeared to me to be more solemn and affecting than public worship : for, while I am thus privately and singly addressing myself to God, I seem to be in a more particular manner regarded by him. At such time, methinks I see the omniscient Eye penetrating my very soul ; and hence I am, as it were, excited to call up all my powers and faculties, to exert themselves in the proper discharge of this important duty.

But it is not necessary that we should always enter into our closets, or any other private place, to pray to God ; nor is any form of words particularly to be regarded. There is a kind of internal worship, or language of the heart, which is certainly as acceptable to that Being, who knows the heart, as the most perfect form of words that ever was composed. This kind of worship must also be founded in a just sense of the infinite perfections of God, of our constant dependance on him, and of the numberless obligations we are under to him. This internal *heart-worship* hath one great advantage,—namely, that of not being confined to time or place. Every thing we

see that discovers to us, in any new and striking manner, the wisdom, power, or goodness, of God, is an immediate call upon us to express our love and reverence. Adoration of his power, and gratitude for his goodness, are, as it were, spontaneously wafted up to heaven, from a good and pious heart. Such grateful and pious ejaculations, pure and unmixed with forms and ceremonies, are incapable of hypocrisy or ostentation, and therefore are certainly most acceptable to God.

## Chap. V.

### GOD OUR FATHER AND BENEFACTOR.

ACTS, xvii. 28.—For in him we live and move and have our being, as certain also of your own poets have said ; for we are also his offspring.

I. PETER, v. 7.—Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.

LUKE, xii. 28.—If then God so clothe the grass of the field, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow in the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith.—V. 32.—Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

THERE are other passages in the New Testament, and many in the Old, expressing that God is our Father and Benefactor ; but those above will be sufficient proofs of the truth of this principle, especially as reason and nature strongly confirm them. God is the Father of all his creatures, from his being the cause of their existence : but farther, he brought them into being for no other end, conceivable by us, but to make them happy ; and hence, in this view, he is more properly the Father of his creatures than any

earthly parent can be of his children, and is more strictly entitled to our filial affection and gratitude.

That he is our Benefactor, I think none in their senses will dispute: if there be any who will, I am sure it is not worth my while to dispute it with them; nor do I write to such irrational unfeeling minds. It has been observed, "that there is no cure for a hard heart." I am sure that heart must indeed be incurable, which is not penetrated with the sense of God's goodness, and that will not acknowledge him to be the Benefactor of the universe. The unhappiness of some in this life is no just argument against God's universal goodness.

If we do not believe that God hath made this world as perfect in its kind, and as happy as it was possible for him to make it, consistent with his attributes and with the nature of things, we believe him to be a malevolent, instead of a good, Being.

Men are often unhappy in consequence of their vices; and this is rather a proof of the goodness of God, than the contrary. But, from whatever cause we are unhappy, if we consider this world as only one short stage of an eternal journey, the ills we suffer here are surely no proofs that God will not (taking in the whole of our existence) be our Father, Friend, and Benefactor. If we had been to live here for ever, it is probable that God would have formed us less liable to sickness, pain, and other misfortunes of the present life, and have made us capable of higher degrees of happiness than we now meet with in this short and precarious state. But, as this is



not our home,—as we take up our lodging here, as it were, for a night only,—it is mean and irrational to be disturbed and impatient at the evils we meet with. Let us look into the works of nature, and see how the different parts, even of this world, are contrived and adapted, by infinite wisdom, to promote the happiness of man, and we shall be forced to acknowledge, notwithstanding the ills we feel, “that God is good to all, and that his tender mercies are over all his works.” He made us; and he upholds us in being, by abundantly supplying all our wants. Every day’s experience witnesses his goodness to us; and every rising sun opens a new scene of wonder, and excites fresh emotions of gratitude and praise. He must, indeed, be blind who cannot see this truth; and he deserves to be for ever dumb who does not gratefully acknowledge it, and whose tongue is not employed in sounding forth the praise of the universal Father and Benefactor of all his creatures.

The love of God comes next in order to be considered, as being a natural consequence of his love to us; and it is strongly recommended,—nay, even commanded,—by Christ himself.

## Chap. VI.

## OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

MATT. xxii. 37.—Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

JAMES, i. 12.—Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

COLL. iii. 2.—Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.

JUDE, the former part of verse 21.—Keep yourselves in the love of God.

THE love of God is the most natural and rational passion that can take place in the mind of man. Whether love be a proper subject for a *command*,\* I cannot determine: however, it was extremely natural and proper for Christ and his apostles to enforce it by every motive and argument in their power. With these, the love of God to us is the strongest: this being a certain proper foundation of our love to him. That man must be insensible to all the feelings of virtuous humanity who can be so ungrateful as not to love his Father, his Friend, and Benefactor: nay, if any person love not God, it must be for want of considering him under these endearing titles and relations. God's love to his creatures is the most disinterested of all love; for it is easy to discover that he did not bring them into being with a view of increasing his own happiness. An infinitely perfect Being cannot receive an accession of happiness from

\* The volition of the mind,—such as love, belief or disbelief of any creeds, doctrines, &c.—is a thing not in our own power, and which we cannot command in ourselves at pleasure.—EDITOR.

goodness ; for the manifestation of his love, in the communication of happiness. He is himself the eternal source of everlasting happiness ; and all nature is united and upheld by him. His goodness very evidently appears in the creation of this world ; which is replete with every thing, not only useful, but ornamental. It is not only amply furnished to supply the wants and necessities of his creatures, but also to improve and heighten their pleasures. The more we contemplate the world, the more grandeur, order, beauty, and variety, we perceive in it ; all pointing out to us the beneficent hand of that Being who formed it, and adapted all its parts to promote the happiness, not only of man, but of every creature that inhabits it. The very method which God has taken to furnish this little world of ours with a succession of creatures of every kind, calls on us, not only to admire and adore, but also gratefully to acknowledge, his infinite wisdom and benevolence ; and, though perhaps seldom thought of, it may not be the least proof of his love to all the creatures who inhabit this globe, that the most exquisite gratification of the senses is made the means to all of propagating their species.\* We are not only formed with intellectual powers and faculties, the due use of which will procure for us the most exalted and rational felicity, but

\* If the pain which women have in bringing forth children should be alleged as an objection to this proof of God's benevolence, be it remembered that this is not a general case with women, nor perhaps a natural one, as is found by experience in very warm climates ; and that other creatures bring forth without pain, unless in particular circumstances.



all our senses are also made the inlets of delight and pleasure, and we are kindly furnished with the means of satisfying all our natural and rational desires. How can we choose but love so benevolent a Being! "Thy works praise thee, O Lord! and we, among the rest of thy intelligent creatures, will for ever bless thee. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." The light of the day, the darkness of the night, with all the various revolutions of the seasons,—all contribute to the happiness of man, and evidently prove the infinite love and benevolence of God to us. Surely such thoughts ought to excite in us the warmest gratitude and affection for this infinite source of all our happiness.

No man, who duly considers the goodness of God, can help loving him: it is out of his power to do otherwise; and, therefore, the command to love God seems unnecessary, unless it relates to the manner of expressing that love; which is certainly best done by acting agreeable to the dictates of reason and nature, contributing all we can to our own happiness, and the happiness of our fellow-creatures: this being the nearest approach to perfection that such imperfect creatures as we are capable of. This will be considered at large, when I come to treat of the social duties.

From what hath been said, it seems clearly to appear that infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, have all been exerted in promoting the happiness of mankind. Surely, then, God ought to be the supreme object of our most ardent affection, as well as of our reverence and adoration. His love to his creatures



the existence of other beings. He created us through the plenitude of his bounty, and the exuberance of his is constant, invariable, and immutable, like himself. "His ways are not as our ways." He is not capricious in his love, like to us mortals. He does not, from mere arbitrary will, prefer one person to another, but desires the happiness of all, (kings and peasants are with him the same;) and, therefore, the best way we have of expressing our love and gratitude to him, is to contribute all we can to the happiness of our brethren. Our best services cannot possibly increase the happiness of the infinitely perfect God; and, therefore, the only way we can, with any propriety, be said to serve him, is to do all in our power to carry on his benevolent plan of universal happiness.

We are told, (Acts x. 34, 35,) "that God is no respecter of persons, but that, in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Here we have a most perfect example of universal benevolence. Persons *of all nations*, and consequently *of all religions*, provided they be workers of righteousness, will be accepted of God. So should they be with us, or we ourselves cannot reasonably expect to be accepted. The condition of our acceptance with God is, *the working righteousness*; or, in other words, being pious, just, charitable, and benevolent. This should also be the condition of approbation with us. Whatever a man's religious opinions or professions may be, though ever so different from our own, yet, if he be a good man, a worker of

righteousness, then we should be ready to do him good ; which is the best way we have in our power of expressing our love to God. If a man be a worker of righteousness, and an example of virtue in his conduct, it should be a sufficient recommendation of him to our charity and brotherly love ; especially as every man, who reflects on his own necessities and frailties, must perceive what strong motives these are to universal benevolence. A man's actions, and not his religious opinions, (provided he has charity for others,) should regulate our conduct towards him. All mankind are our brethren : difference in opinion by no means destroys the relation. Besides, we are told that, if we love not our brethren, we cannot love God.

## BOOK II.

CONTAINING

THE DUTIES WHICH WE OWE TO OURSELVES.

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### Chap. I.

OF WISDOM.

JAMES, i. 5.—If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.—iii. 17.—But the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

I HAVE hitherto considered the duties which men owe to God, as their Creator, Preserver, and constant Benefactor. Now, from these relations, an entire submission to the divine commands is clearly to be deduced. From a sense of his being our Maker and Sovereign, arises our homage and adoration; and from a sense of his being our Benefactor, arises the most pure and ardent affection for him.

I am now to consider man as divested of all his relations to God, and to point out his obligations to himself. These will arise out of that rational love of himself, which is required and necessitated by the law of nature, where reason presides. Now, here I would distinguish between that self-love which con-



sists in a gratification of irregular desires, out of which arises pride, vanity, and arrogance ; and that ardent rational affection for himself, and desire of pleasure, which nature inspires in every man, and out of which will arise the practice of those virtues which will best promote his true and rational happiness, both in body and in soul. But, as the soul is far more excellent than the body, its happiness should always be first consulted. Our reason and resolution should always be exerted in forcing the body to obedience, whenever its irregular passions obstruct, or would sacrifice, the happiness of the soul. I mean not, by this, that we should deprive the body of those gratifications which are essential to its happiness, which are lawful, and which are made necessary by nature : so far am I from it, that it appears to me to be our duty to heighten and improve the pleasures of the senses.

It seems very clear, that our natural and sensual gratifications are not displeasing to God : and so far are they from being contrary to his beneficent scheme of creation, that he appears to have made myriads of perceptive beings, capable of pleasure and pain, for no other end, as to themselves, but the enjoyment of the natural pleasures of their senses. He has likewise furnished the world with an infinite variety, which appears to be calculated for no other end but to supply matter, and produce entertainment and pleasure, for the senses. The desires of the body have God for their author, as well as those that are intellectual ; and, therefore, it must not only be innocent, but our natural and reasonable duty, to improve



them, and to give them the highest relish. In this view of the case, all voluntary penances, abstinences, fastings, floggings, and the like, are not only ridiculous and foolish, but also unnatural and displeasing to God, who delights in the happiness of his creatures, "who is paid when man receives. To enjoy is to obey."

But, while we are endeavouring to improve and heighten the pleasures of the senses, we should always remember that it should be done in due subordination to the pleasures and happiness of the soul; the one being only a fabric of clay, that will soon be reduced to dust; the other a celestial being, whose existence, as we suppose, will be eternal.

By improving sensual pleasures, I would not be understood to mean the most frequent gratification of bodily desires: on the contrary, I mean the using them with due moderation, by not exceeding the laws of nature.

This restriction, and curb on our appetites, nature exactly teaches: take her then for your guide, and, through all the pleasures of the senses, she will be a proper check on every exorbitancy, provided you listen attentively to her voice. When, instead of satisfying our hunger and thirst, (those calls of nature for the preservation of life,) we run into intemperance, she checks us by a sick stomach, an aching head, trembling nerves, and often by taking away, for a time, the very power of farther hurting ourselves. This is also the case with every other sensual gratification; and in this the wisdom and goodness of the God of nature are abundantly displayed. Men

of very strong constitutions may not so soon feel the ill effects of intemperance and debauchery, but still let such remember that they are sapping the very foundations of life; and that an immature and untimely death will, sooner or later, be the fatal consequence.

A proper and moderate use of sensual pleasures, of every kind, will most certainly improve them, raise their relish, and give them a zest which hardly ever accompanies intemperance and debauchery.

The law of nature is exactly followed, in this particular, by the brute creation; and hence their pleasures are thought to be more exquisite than ours. If nature then teaches the brute creation, and leads them to the highest improvement of their pleasures, which are merely sensual, shall reason and nature both be unable to teach us our duty and our interest, and to curb our vicious and irregular appetites? Let us love ourselves rationally. Let us improve the pleasures of the senses by a proper and moderate use of them, which is certainly our duty; but let us be careful, as I said before, always to observe a due subordination between these and the more pure and exalted pleasures of the soul or mind. In order to raise and improve the pleasures of the soul or mind, take the light of nature, and the doctrines of Christ founded thereon, for your guide; and these will direct you to that heavenly wisdom mentioned above, by St. James, namely,—“that you should be pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” These are the signatures of true wisdom,—of

that wisdom which originally came down from God, —which *nature* ever taught,—*reason* always recommended,—and which Christ and his apostles revived in the world, at a time when *idolatry*, *superstition*, *enthusiasm*, and *priestcraft*, had overspread the face of the earth, like a deluge, and left no room for the heaven-born virtues of *charity* and *benevolence* to grow up and exert themselves.

## Chap. II.

### OF PRUDENCE.

I. THESS. v. 21, 22.—Prove all things: hold fast that which is good: abstain from all appearance of evil.

THIS important duty is no where, that I have observed, particularly taken notice of in the New Testament; yet it is certainly included in St. Paul's advice, above mentioned. Prudence, if duly attended to, will contribute more to our happiness than perhaps any other virtue. “He who possesses prudence has a divine guide in his own breast.”

In speculation, prudence will guard the mind against too readily assenting to propositions, without first thoroughly examining them; which will prevent our being grossly imposed upon. This branch of prudence is what St. Paul so strongly recommends in the foregoing text. I wish his advice was more duly attended to. We are too apt to embrace opinions



without examining them; and more especially *religious opinions* and *dogmas*, which, above all other, should be brought to the bar of reason, for a fair and impartial trial, before they are adopted; because reason is the best test of the truth of religious opinions. Nature, as well as St. Paul, teaches that we must try before we can distinguish; and that we must distinguish before we can be certain of holding fast that which is good. Nothing that is above the reach of our capacities, or that we cannot form any judgment of, can by us be determined to do good: it may, for aught we know about it, as well be bad, and not proper to be held fast and made a part of our creed, or a principle of our conduct. No religious opinion, or moral rule, can properly be called good, or fit to be held fast by us, but such as is a proper foundation for right action; and such must be determined by reason.

Prudence is an important branch of true wisdom; and is a consequence of due attention, a sound judgment, and an inflexible resolution. Thus formed, her office is to regulate and direct our choice of objects. If a man desires an object inconsistent, upon the whole, with his own happiness, he is wretchedly imprudent; and yet the appearance and allurements of *present good* so engage the attention, and captivate the soul, that we often make a precipitate choice; neglecting to deliberate, consult, and weigh the consequence in the scale of reason. We cannot choose evil as evil: our wrong choice arises from our ignorance, and our being deceived by an appearance of good, where, in truth, there is nothing but real evil.



Plato says, "If a man falls into a wicked course of life, it arises from his ignorance in mistaking evil for good, and misery for happiness; for, as all virtue is voluntary, so all vice is involuntary, and arises from mistake,—it being impossible for a man to choose evil as evil."

The business of prudence, then, is to keep the mind upon its guard, and to prevent any rash determination, with regard either to speculation or to practice; so that it may be always determined, and fixed on the most worthy objects.

The embracing religious opinions as true without examining them, is, to the last degree, imprudent; for, without the trial recommended by St. Paul, we may adopt false opinions for true, and bad for good; by which our happiness in this life, as well as in a future, may be affected, if not destroyed. I shall conclude this chapter by observing, that no arrows wound us so deep as those which we sharpen by our own imprudence.

## Chap. III.

## OF PRIDE AND HUMILITY.

I. TIM. vi. 17, 18, 19.—Charge them that are rich in the world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy : That they do good ; that they be rich in good works ; ready to distribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

JAMES, iv. 6.—God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.  
—V. 10.—Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

MATT. xxiii. 12.—And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

THOUGH pride and humility are directly opposite to one another, and cannot well find place in the same mind, yet I choose to bring them into one chapter, and consider them together, because they will serve to illustrate each other ; and because the deformity of the one, and the beauty of the other, will be heightened by being set in contrast.

Pride, of all the passions, is that which renders us most obnoxious and hateful to our fellow-creatures. What makes it still worse is, that it is scarcely ever connected with real merit.

But, if God hath blessed any with qualifications superior to what the generality of mankind possess, gratitude should take place of pride. We should be thankful to God ; but never despise our fellow-creatures, who, perhaps, may be endowed with some other accomplishments of which we have no share,

and are free from faults which we have in abundance.

Pride certainly appears irrational, whatever light it be considered in. The greatest degree of merit is no proper foundation for it: but it is to the last degree ridiculous to be proud of those things which have no merit in them; such as honours, riches, beauty, strength, and the like.

Pride sinks and debases human nature; whilst humility raises and advances it, till it becomes god-like. Pride darkens and obscures our accomplishments; but humility adorns and gives lustre to them. Humility has always the advantage of pride, but infinitely so in circumstances of distress. We readily reach out a benevolent hand to assist the humble: but, when the proud man falls, there is no one ready to raise him up; he lies unpitied and unassisted by his fellow-creatures, and is far from being a proper object of the favour of God, "who resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." I shall say no more on this subject here, as I intend to treat more largely of it in another place: but only add, that the pride which I here and elsewhere condemn, is not that generous noble pride which springs from conscious innocence and some degree of merit, and which keeps us superior to mean actions; but that low pride, which makes persons vain of those things in which there is no merit, and inclines them to treat their brethren with disdain and contempt.

## Chap. IV.

## OF TEMPERANCE.

- I. COR. ix. 25.**—And every man that striveth for the mastery, is temperate in all things: now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.—**Ver. 27.**—But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, least that, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.—**Chap. v. 9.**—I wrote to you in an epistle, not to keep company with fornicators.—**Chap. vi. 9.**—Know ye not, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind;—**Ver. 10.**—Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.
- GAL. v. 19.**—Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness.—**Ver. 22.**—But the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, —**Ver. 23.**—Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.
- HEB. xiii. 4.**—Marriage is honourable in all, when the bed is undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.
- EPHES. v. 3.**—But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you.
- I. THESS. iv. 3.**—For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication.
- JAMES, v. 5.**—Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter.
- LUKE, xxi. 34.**—And take heed to yourselves, least at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.
- I. PETER, iv. 3.**—For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lascivious lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquettings, and abominable idolatries.
- ROM. xiii. 13.**—Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.
- EPHES. v. 18.**—And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the spirit.
- I. THESS. v. 7, 8.**—For they that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that are drunken are drunken in the night: but let us, who are of the day, be sober.

THE great consequence of this duty may be judged of by the number of places in the New Testament wherein it is mentioned. Nature also points it out



as a duty, on the practice of which the happiness of mankind very much depends.

If we take temperance in its most extensive sense, it is a virtue which serves for a boundary to all the passions: but, in a more limited one, it includes *chastity* and *sobriety* only, each of which I shall discourse of in its order; and first of chastity.

Temperance will always heighten and improve every bodily gratification, as it confines us to a prudent moderation in the use of things adapted to please the senses; and herein the virtue of temperance consists. It does not prohibit the gratifications of our senses, but only restrains those gratifications within proper bounds.

By chastity, I would not be understood to mean absolute continence; for this would be opposing one of nature's greatest and wisest laws. I mean only that unmarried persons should be continent, for otherwise they cannot be chaste; but married persons may be chaste without being continent. I have proved, under the article Wisdom, that it is our duty to heighten and improve our bodily pleasures; and that this is to be done only by temperance, or a moderate use of them.

In the pleasures of love,—I mean those bodily pleasures which arise from a commerce between the different sexes. If you would have those pleasures to be improved, if you would give those gratifications the highest relish, take temperance for your guide, and never let love be excluded: I mean a rational love, founded in virtue, which unites souls as well as bodies. It is impossible that a casual transient en-

joyment can be equal to that which arises from a permanent benevolence, where the mind has its share, and where love and innocence are united : but even here, temperance will always be your best guide ; for temperance will heighten and improve even innocent gratifications.

But the pleasures arising from conjugal love are also heightened by benevolence, or the desire of communicating happiness to others. Whenever this heaven-born principle can be joined with bodily, or sensual, gratifications, it will greatly improve them. A mutual consciousness of communicating pleasure, where virtuous love is the foundation, and temperance prescribes the bounds, will give a relish of sensual delights, unknown to the intemperate and debauched.

Let the libertine, who has roved lawless and unbounded in the paths of lust, and who has dearly purchased variety to heighten his enjoyments,—if ever his heart has been touched with the pure flame of virtuous wedded love,—let him, I say, tell me whether he did not taste pleasures more intense, when confined to one single object, than what the utmost variety could afford. I think I may, with certainty, answer for him in the affirmative ; for the reason is plain : in the unlawful gratification, it is probable that neither temperance, chastity, love, nor benevolence, bore any part ; but, in the innocent one, they all contributed to improve his pleasures.

Though the seraglio of the libertine should exceed even that of Solomon, both in beauty and variety, yet I will venture to say, that the enjoyment of one

virtuous woman, who has fixed the affection, and retains it by a good conduct, will yield more exquisite delight than ever was experienced from any casual gratifications of this kind ; even though beauty, art, and variety, all combined to enhance the enjoyment.

Thus far I have considered temperance only as it is relative to chastity,—I shall now consider it as relative to sobriety. The use of temperance, in this light, is to repress immoderate eating and drinking. These gratifications are innocent in themselves, because they are essentially necessary to the support of our being ; and these will also be heightened and improved by temperance : but, without this guide, they will tend to shorten the life which they were intended to preserve.

To shew the ill consequence of drinking to excess, and to give a frightful representation of this vice, we need not go so far as Lacedemonia. Look into the streets of London, and you will daily see spectacles of horror and detestation ; you will see human nature degraded, by a sordid intemperance, lower than any thing which the *brute creation* can exhibit. Faithful *instinct* keeps these from excess, and they never lose sight of their guide : but *reason*, the guide of man,—that ray from heaven, that emanation from the infinite source of perfection,—is either unattended to, or made the slave of passion and irregular appetite. Brutes in the form of men,—and, I am sorry to say it, of women too,—may be seen to reel in the streets, under a load of liquor, without guard or guide ; having deprived themselves of reason, which else



would be the guide of their actions, and having inflamed their passions, by artificial spirits, even to frenzy, they are exposed, and often animated, to the perpetration of the most horrid crimes. Drunkenness is, therefore, a sin against society: it is absolutely inconsistent with the duties which we owe to ourselves and to others, and, of course, very displeasing to God. How carefully, then, should it be guarded against!

But I shall farther consider the vice of intemperance, or of immoderate eating and drinking, as it has a natural tendency to put an early period to that life which God and nature bid us preserve. This is a kind of *suicide*, as much against the law of nature as any other species of self-murder would be. How far the lives of those who thus indulge their sordid appetites may be useful to society, I cannot say: God knows what business he hath for them to do; but *this* we know, *this* nature teaches us,—that we ought not to shorten our lives, but wait till God sees fit to call us hence. He is our Lord and Sovereign, and we are his creatures and subjects: we received our lives from him; and, when he pleases, in the course of his providence, to demand them back, we should, without fear or doubt about a future state, be ready to resign them,—but not before. No man can be totally unconnected with other beings: the taking away of his life, then, may affect the happiness of others, and in some measure disturb the order of the universe; for the chain is vast and extensive, and the dependencies and connexions of each link may be much closer than we apprehend: and, in this light,



suicide must appear to be a crime.\* Gluttony and drunkenness are sure poisons, though they may be slow in their operation: but the crime takes place long before the criminal puts an end to his life; for his faculties are often impaired, or rendered useless,

\* The generality of writers against suicide have adopted the above-mentioned opinions: but, surely, it is making the life of a man of too much consequence in the universal system, to suppose that the taking it away might break the chain of nature, and disturb the order of the universe. If this was really the case, the thief at the gallows might fairly plead the argument, and urge the importance of his life, as connected with other beings. Though the idea of a scale of beings, in a due gradation from the highest angel to the meanest insect, has been adopted by some writers; yet, even supposing a foundation in reason and nature for this opinion, it doth not from thence follow that every individual being is such a link as, if taken away, would unconnect the universal chain, though the total destruction of any species of beings might be supposed to do so. In the first view, the death of a fly may, with as much propriety, be said to break a link of the chain, and to disturb the order of the universe, as the death of a man. The act of suicide may be (as perhaps all our actions are) indifferent in itself with regard to God, and criminal only in proportion to the degree of moral evil that attends it, which may be much greater in one person than in another: and there may be cases where there would be more evil in a person's living miserable than could be produced by his death, whether violent or natural. However, after all, it must be allowed, that a person guilty of suicide betrays an impatience and cowardice under the ills of life inconsistent with the character of a rational being, who believes himself under the government of an infinitely wise and good God.\*

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\* Suicide implies cowardice in the highest degree, in not having sufficient courage, resolution, and philosophy, to encounter in this life the utmost frowns of fortune, though they were even worse than death itself.—EDITOR.

by these excesses, many years before his death. Upon the whole, intemperance is a crime not inferior to a violent and sudden death procured by a man's own hands.

## Chap. V.

### OF PATIENCE.

LUKE, xxi. 19.—In your patience possess ye your souls.

ROM. xii. 12.—Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer.

I. THESS. v. 14.—Now we exhort ye, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient towards all men.

HEB. x. 36.—For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.—Chap. xii. 1.—Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

JAMES, i. 4.—But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.—Chap. v. 7.—Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receives the early and the latter rain.—Ver. 8.—Be ye also patient.

I. PET. ii. 19.—For this is thank-worthy, if a man, for conscience toward God, endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

II. PET. i. 5, 6, 7.—And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.

HERE we see how earnestly the duty of patience is recommended in the New Testament. Nature also strongly inculcates it. Patience is pointed out to us as a virtue as well as a duty which we owe to ourselves and to our fellow-creatures, because it tends to promote the happiness of society. For this reason also it appears to be a duty which we owe to God, whose creatures we all are, and who most certainly intended the happiness of all intelligences. That

it promotes our own happiness, every man's experience teaches; and this is the best proof that can be offered.

Impatience and fretfulness under the ills of life will lessen our power to bear them. The *body* and the *mind* are so intimately connected, that whatever affects the one will also affect the other, and both will be hurt by impatience,—both greatly weakened. The health of the one will be impaired, and the calm serenity of the other ruffled into a storm. On the contrary, patience and forbearance either blunt the arrows of fortune, or will prove a balm to heal our wounds.

We should consider that, in such a world as this is, where there are so many different interests to be pursued,—so many different tempers and tastes to be gratified,—we ought not to expect to bring mankind to our own standard and opinion, in either case. Different ages, different opinions, different circumstances, will ever operate to counteract our plan. This it is the business of patience to fortify us against; and, if we would be happy, we should learn this important lesson; viz.—that, where we cannot bring mankind to conform to our taste and manners, we should endeavour, as far as the principles of truth and virtue will allow, to conform ourselves to theirs. Let us render our own tempers pliable and gentle, and we shall find less opposition from others. This conformity at once blunts the edge of contradiction: by this means it hurts us no longer; and hence the struggle is soon over, and we are at peace. But if it should so happen, as sometimes it may, that we are



persecuted and used ill, notwithstanding all our endeavours to live in peace and on good terms with the world, yet, even in this case, patience is the best remedy.

If we are bound in the cords of adversity, struggling will only strain the knots the harder ; by which we shall be more injured.\* Besides, there is something noble and philosophic in being calm and unruffled amid the storms and tempests of fortune : it is one proof of our innocence. God himself will look on such objects with an eye of pity and complacency.

Let us consider, farther, that mankind are no more obliged to conform to our opinions, than we are to theirs. A difference may arise even about indifferent things, and where moral good and evil are quite out of the question. Let us not be angry with one another on this account : these are the consequences of human frailty and *human freedom* ; and, though mankind have one steady uniform light to guide them, they will not all think alike. Difference of capacity, or of education, will create difference in opinion. One man is of a lively acute genius, improved by reading and converse ; another is heavy, dull, slow, and illiterate : such can hardly ever think alike, yet the last may be as good and as honest a man as the first ; and hence they should bear with one another. Age and youth will infallibly think

\* Here I would not be understood to mean, that we should tamely and passively submit to injuries, without using proper means to extricate ourselves ; but that, when these fail, we should resign our cause to God, and patiently wait for relief in his good time.



differently: every one knows this; and this is so natural a consequence, that we ought never to be angry about it, but patiently bear all the contradictions which generally arise from this disparity. The youthful and healthy ought to bear with the frowardness of age and sickness, considering that they may one day be in the same unhappy situation. On the other hand, the aged should forgive the lively sallies, and excuse the innocent foibles, of youth, remembering that they were once young themselves.

One man delights in talking much, another loves silence; yet both may be virtuous good men: these should patiently bear with each other, or keep at a distance. After all, let us return to that excellent rule of *doing to others as we would they should do unto us*. Let our attention be constantly fixed on this golden moral rule, and it will teach us exactly how to behave in almost every circumstance of life. Let us think, if we are ourselves without faults, how noble it is to bear with those of other people: but, if we are not, which is much more likely to be the case, surely we ought to treat others as we would wish that they should treat us; and we should excuse their foibles, as we crave indulgence for our own. Let us consider that they are men like ourselves; and, if they are good and virtuous, we should be always ready to make allowance for human frailties. We should make this our constant practice, even though we thought ourselves better than others; seeing that the infinitely perfect God and Father of the universe makes this the rule of his conduct towards his creatures. He is constantly represented, in the New

Testament, as a God of *patience, long-suffering, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth*: though the Jews, who were a gloomy people, often represented him, in the Old Testament, as a jealous, peevish, passionate, and revengeful being; which Plutarch considered as most impious superstition and horrid blasphemy, more affronting to the Deity than downright atheism.

## Chap. VI.

### OF ANGER.

EPHES. iv. 26, 31.—Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.

JAMES, i. 19, 20.—Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

ANGER, when it arises to any considerable height, is a passion destructive of our own peace, as well as of the peace of others. It is a violent storm in the mind, which ruffles and agitates it to such a degree, that it breaks through the bounds of reason, and deprives us of its guard and guidance; after which we are driven before the tempest, like a ship without a rudder, till we are dashed upon the rocks of error, imprudence, and folly, which, in our calmer moments, we should have seen and avoided: for, in those violent paroxysms of anger, we are liable to actions which, at another time, we should be shocked with the thoughts of: but if, in this frenzy, in these unguarded moments, we should not be so unhappy as to do much

mischief, yet this passion almost always betrays us into meanness. Thus hurtful is anger. Not only the mind, but the body also, is greatly affected by its baneful influence. Our features are distorted, and greatly altered by it: the smooth brow, the placid look, the courteous smile, are changed into a ghastly form, which, instead of pleasing, terrifies and affrights beholders. Violent anger will also weaken our nerves, and tends to bring on very dangerous disorders. Nature and reason, then, must surely teach us to avoid it. We are also cautioned against it, in the strongest terms, in the New Testament: we are advised to check it in the beginning; and we should do this by applying speedily to our reason for assistance, as we would do to a physician in the most dangerous disease. If we are at any time provoked to anger, we should always keep it within bounds, in such manner that it may not transport and hurry us into the commission of sin. If we cannot always prevent anger, we should do all in our power to shorten the fit. We are told, that “the sun should not go down upon our wrath.” Truly, a day is much too long for the indulgence of anger. The setting sun should never witness such unreasonable conduct. A man in a violent fit of anger may be compared to a house in a flame, which, if not soon quenched, will certainly consume it, and probably damage or destroy those of his neighbours also.

In order the more effectually to check and restrain this pernicious passion, so hurtful to ourselves and to others, let us consider who those are with whom we are angry. Our *fellow-creatures* are all our



*brethren*, and should be treated with humanity, kindness, tenderness, and brotherly love: besides, the being angry with our brother is a crime which, the Scripture tells us, will be severely punished. But farther, and to conclude this article, let us consider how disagreeable it is to have others angry with us, and to see passion and resentment take place of kindness and affection; and let us here apply that most excellent rule, so often repeated in this work, of *doing to others as we would they should do unto us*.

## Chap. VII.

### OF COVETOUSNESS.

MATT. vi. 19, 20, 21.—Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt; and where thieves do not break through and steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

MATT. xix. 23, 24.—Then Jesus said unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven; and again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

LUKE, xii. 15.—And he said unto them, Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

I. COR. vi. 10.—Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

EPHES. v. 5.—For this ye know, that no whoremonger nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolator, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

HEB. xiii. 5.—Let your conversation be without covetousness.

You see that covetousness is considered by Christ and his apostles as a great vice. Reason also condemns it; as every one will find who candidly consults that unerring guide.



Covetousness may be considered in a two-fold manner:—first, as an inordinate love of riches; and secondly, as an unlawful desire of possessing the properties of others. I shall treat of both in their order.

In the first place, then, covetousness may be defined—an *excessive* love of riches. Now the love of riches, when it becomes excessive, becomes criminal; for it is the exorbitance only of the passion that constitutes its criminality. A man may love riches and desire to possess them, because they give him power and extend his influence, and hence enable him to communicate more good to others. This desire and disposition, then, far from being accounted a vice, is always esteemed a virtue. But the covetous man, from an inordinate and unreasonable love of riches, is led to desire them only for their own sake; hence, to pervert their use: and, instead of making them subservient to his own happiness and to that of others, he denies to himself, and to others, all those advantages which would accrue from a proper application of them. His narrow contracted soul feels no pleasure but in contemplating the sum which he has amassed together. He is so unsocial a being, that he hardly deserves the name of human. How irrational are his pleasures!—or, I might more properly say, how irrational is his pleasure! for he seems to have but *one*,—namely, that of counting his gold; and this one greatly allayed by the fear “that thieves may break through and steal” what he holds dearer than his soul. It is the rich man of this character that the Scripture points out as having so difficult a

task to get to heaven: for certainly it cannot mean the possessors of riches in general. Riches, accompanied with a benevolent heart, will be so far from retarding, that they will greatly facilitate, our happiness. Instead of making the road difficult and narrow, they will, when properly employed, open a smooth and easy passage to everlasting felicity. The benevolent man will do good with his riches. To do good is to be good; to be good is to be happy; and to be happy is to enjoy heaven, though not removed from earth. But, on the other hand, the covetous man, as above described, will (according to the expressive language of the New Testament) find it as difficult to pass into happiness, or to have this foretaste of heaven, as "it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle." No state of rational happiness can suit his sordid and grovelling soul; and, therefore, such a state as we hope will be our lot hereafter can be no heaven for him. It is in this sense, doubtless, that the rich covetous man cannot inherit the kingdom of God, or a state of everlasting happiness.

But, secondly, covetousness is an unlawful desire to possess the properties of others. Nothing but the fear of human laws bars the covetous man from doing this by force, whenever he has the power to do it.

A man, whose heart is so callous as not to feel the distresses of his fellow-mortals, or who will not stretch out his hand to relieve them, when he has the means of doing it in his power;—a man who can taste no pleasure in cheering the heart, nor in lighting up the countenance of the widow, the fatherless, and the distressed of any kind,—we may, I think,

fairly conclude, would not scruple to make use of unlawful means to procure riches, though great distress to others might be the consequence of it, provided he thought himself secure from human laws.

Riches, amassed by a sordid avaricious man, may well be said to be a "temptation and a snare:" for, as his heaps increase, and his bags multiply, his passion for riches augments.\* And hence we may venture to say, for experience warrants it, that inveterate covetousness and dishonesty are almost always connected.

To have a transient wish, or desire, for the property of others, which reason immediately checks and condemns, is not the crime here spoken of; nor can it, with propriety, be called coveting. It may not be in our power to prevent the entrance of such desires, just when the object strikes on the senses: but they are presently regulated in a good heart, and the thought of using unlawful means to acquire riches is looked on with horror and detestation.

There is a command in the Jewish law against covetousness, of the kind which I am now considering: for, to *covet* must there mean an unlawful desire of *possessing*, which is restrained only by the want of power, or the fear of human laws; because, in any other sense, the command would have no propriety in it. The New Testament likewise agrees with reason and nature in condemning this vice, in both the lights in which I have represented it; as also in branding it with infamy, by joining it with theft,

\* Crescit amor nummi ut ipsa pecunia crescit.



Col. iii. 5.

whoredom, extortion, and the like atrocious crimes; and by saying, that it is idolatry itself,—“and covetousness, which is idolatry.” The riches of the covetous man becomes the rival of his God, and another object of his worship. Gold is the idol to which he pays his devotions, and which engages his most ardent affection. How worthless a member of society is the covetous man! How unworthy an object of divine favour must that man be, who, so far from using his endeavours to carry on the infinitely benevolent plan of universal happiness, does all in his power to prevent it, by locking up in his coffers one of the means of happiness to others!

### Chap. VIII.

#### OF CONTENTMENT.

I. COR. x. 10.—Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

I. TIM. vi. 6, 7, 8.—But godliness with contentment is great gain; for we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.

HEB. xiii. 5.—Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

PHILLIP. iv. 11.—For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

THIS is a duty which we, in a particular manner, owe to ourselves, and a virtue which nature and right reason require that we should cultivate; as they do the practice of every virtue which tends to promote our happiness. But the duty of contentment is to be observed and practised under the direction and



guidance of right reason ; for, without this sage Minerva, even the virtue of contentment, which is defined by some to be a negative kind of happiness, may degenerate and be a concomitant of vice. In order to clear this point, I shall consider what those situations and things are with which we ought to be content, and what is not so. But first I would observe, that absolute contentment is not in our power, and therefore cannot be required of us in this state : even a certain measure of it depends much on constitution and natural disposition. From these causes it sometimes degenerates into sloth, and many persons sit down contented in a situation with which they ought not to be content ; but, on the contrary, if they were to examine, they would find it their duty to exert themselves in shifting the scene. It appears to me, that God does not require of us absolute contentment in any situation this life affords.

Contentment seems to be the first step to happiness ; but it is not happiness itself. We should not rest in the attainments that we make in virtue, because we may still soar higher. We cannot reach perfection : but we should be always aiming at it. It is very clear that nature did not intend to make absolute content the portion of this life : we are formed of decaying materials, liable to sickness, pain, disease, and disappointment ; and, besides, we are liable to be made unhappy by our connexions with others. Virtue herself will not guard us against the ills of life : on the contrary, she is often depressed and trampled on by Vice, which is frequently seen to ride triumphant through the world. This, surely,

then is not a state for perfect contentment: and, therefore, we may fairly and rationally conclude from it, as well as from all our ideas of the wisdom, justice, and benevolence, of our heavenly Father, that there will be a future state of existence; where all the rational desires of the soul will be satisfied, and the most perfect happiness that finite creatures are capable of will produce the most perfect contentment.

If this was the only state the soul was to exist in, doubtless all her rational desires would have found suitable objects wherewith to be satisfied, and she would not have been constantly reaching out to something beyond this world. Nay, it is to be presumed that, in such a case, God would never have furnished us with any ideas of another state of existence. The desire of life and happiness seems natural to us: it is also natural, then, to desire an extension of them beyond this world,—nay, to eternity. Would God make us susceptible of such desires, if a few years spent in this world were to put a final period to our existence?—I think not; and some have brought this, among others, as a proof of a future state.

From what has been said, then, we may fairly conclude, that absolute contentment is not required of us in this state; and hence all that is comprehended under this duty is the behaving with ease, decency, and composure, under all the allotments of providence. The kind of contentment required of us here is something opposite to peevishness, fretfulness, uneasiness, complaining, and the like; all which increase our difficulties, and make us disagreeable to

others. But I need not be very particular in pointing out what situations in life we should endeavour to be contented with ; because, in general, we ought to be satisfied with such as Providence hath placed us in : for, this we may be sure of, that God, upon the whole, will make us happy, if we contribute our part towards it, and act agreeably to the dictates of reason and of nature.

I am next to consider what those things are with which we should not be content, or sit down easy under. As we are told, in general, that it is our duty to be contented with the allotments of Providence,—so, on the other hand, we should not be contented under those evils which we bring on ourselves, but should exert our best powers and abilities to shake them off, and shift the scene. The evils which we bring on ourselves, we ourselves are able, in general, to remove ; and hence it becomes our duty to endeavour so to do : but those ills which Providence allots us we should patiently submit to, praying to God for relief in his due time. The evils which we bring on ourselves are, in general, the consequences of vice : *dishonesty, intemperance, and debauchery*, as naturally produce evils as any other cause produces its effect. Remove the cause, then, and the effect will cease : be *honest*, be *temperate*, be *virtuous*,—follow *reason* and *nature*, and you will be happy.—But to proceed.

We should not be contented in any situation in which we cannot be useful to society ; for, whenever this is the case, we may be assured that we are not in the right way,—we should strive to mend our



situation, and not sit down satisfied with any thing short of virtue.

A celebrated poet has said, that "whatever is, is right." I cannot admit this maxim into my creed without explanation. Whatever falls to our lot by the wise order of Providence, is undoubtedly *right*, and productive of good upon the whole: but whatever is a consequence of our own misconduct, is as certainly *wrong*. Whatever is done, which is right, is better to have been done than left undone. Surely this cannot be said by the actions of men in general. This may be applied to my subject. Whatever God does is right; and we should be as easy, as patient, and as contented with it, as possible. This is the virtue, the state of contentment, for which I am contending. But we should never be contented in a slothful, useless situation: contentment here would be a vice.

Let virtue be the prize, and you cannot struggle too hard to attain it. Be not contented with any thing short of it.

It has been said by some, that a contented man is as happy as any man can be. If this be true, it overturns the whole force of my argument: but I cannot agree that it is so, or that apathy can be happiness; because it is possible for a man to be contented, without ever performing any one good action. Give the same person ability and inclination to do good, and to communicate happiness to others, and he will be a much happier man than he was before, and will wonder how he came to be contented in a situation so far short of rational happiness. Upon the



whole, if contentment be happiness, an *ideot*, or a *beast*, may be as happy as an *angel*.

Contentment may imply a great degree of patience under misfortunes ; a satisfaction with our own possessions and attainments, without envying those above us. This we should all aim at : it is, in this sense, a virtue which tends to promote our happiness ; and, therefore, nature and the New Testament both require the practice of it.

## BOOK III.

CONTAINING

### THE DUTIES WHICH WE OWE TO OUR FELLOW-CREATURES.

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I AM now to consider the duties which we owe to our fellow-creatures ; and to shew that the rules for our conduct, laid down in the New Testament, are also, in this particular, such as reason and nature teach.

These duties arise out of the relations we stand in to one another : and, as these relations are invariable, —as we can never cease to be brethren, all being children of the same almighty Parent,—so the duties arising out of these relations must also be invariable, and of eternal obligation.

Take these duties together, and they amount to this,—namely, that we ought to contribute all that lies in our power to the happiness of one another. This maxim is agreeable to the kind intention of our heavenly Father, “ who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works ;” and who could have no motive (conceivable by us) for bringing us into being but to make us all happy. Surely then, as brethren, we have the strongest claim upon each other for all the good offices in our power : and

this must also be pleasing to God, as it is contributing, according to our abilities, towards carrying on his benevolent plan of universal happiness. Nature teaches this ; and the New Testament both teaches and commands it.

## Chap. I.

### OF LOVE TO OUR FELLOW-CREATURES.

MATT. xxii. 39.—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

ROM. xii. 10.—Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love.

ROM. xiii. 8.—Owe no man any thing, but to love one another ; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

I. THESS. iv. 9.—But, as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you ; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

JAMES, ii. 8.—If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scriptures, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,—ye do well.

By love cannot here be meant that involuntary passion which arises in the mind, from objects which appear to us amiable : such objects we cannot help loving ; and, for this reason, we cannot with propriety, in such case, be commanded to do it as a duty. It, therefore, must mean that we are obliged to extend our good offices to all within the reach of our abilities. In our conduct towards our fellow-creatures, our justice should be inflexible, our charity diffusive, and our benevolence universal and unbounded. The practice of all these virtues ought to flow from, and be joined with, a sense of our duty to God ; as well as from a consciousness of the obligation we lie under to our fellow-creatures. In this view, how nobly does a man distinguish himself ! how well does he

answer the end of his creation! when his feeling heart expands, takes in the claims of his fellow-creatures all around him, and from hence diffuses his bounty to the needy and distressed. A feeling heart is, upon the whole, one of heaven's choicest gifts,—as it is the fountain from whence flow almost all the social virtues. But though, as men, we are all brethren, yet all mankind have not an equal claim to our affection. We are allowed to begin, in the diffusions of our benevolence, with our own families; then, to dispense it to our friends and more distant relations; next, to our country, or to the society or community to which we belong; and, finally, we are instructed to attain that extensive sense of humanity, that diffusive spirit of beneficence, which comprehends the whole world: all should partake, at least, of our ardent prayers and wishes for their happiness, when more is not in our power.

We are not made for ourselves, more than we are for society. We are a part of that *whole* which God intended to make happy; and therefore, as good beings, we should contribute our share towards the production of happiness in the world. To effect this, we should not only be just, charitable, and benevolent,—not only be ready to relieve the distresses of mankind,—but we should also be affable, courteous, complaisant, good-humoured, free, easy, and submissive; for all these lesser duties tend likewise to promote the happiness of society, to render us the objects of universal esteem, and at the same time to increase our own felicity.

Indeed, self-love and social are so much the same,



that what promotes the happiness of the one will always have a tendency to promote the happiness of the other.

The duties which we owe to ourselves, the duties which we owe to society, and, we may add, the duties which we owe to God, can hardly be separated.

We have no command in Scripture for loving ourselves, because such command would have been unnecessary. Self-love is implanted too strongly in us by nature to need any other motive. Besides, self-love is pre-supposed in the command—"to love your neighbour as yourself:" but this command can mean no more than that we should be ready to do good to others, as nature has taught us to be forward to do good to ourselves. However, this is carrying the command rather farther than reason and nature dictate: nay, the strict and absolute observance of it has, I believe, seldom been known; for the preference, at least, will always be given to ourselves. Nature teaches it; and therefore such self-love can hardly be culpable. We have another command in the Scripture, which serves to confirm this opinion, viz.—where we are directed to love our enemies. Now, it would be impossible to comply with this command, if it meant that we should love them as well as we do ourselves; or even with that kind of affection which we have for our friends, and for those who love us. This is not in our power; and therefore reason and nature do not require it.

All that can be meant in this command, to love our enemies, is that we should be ready to forgive them, and be so far from revenging injuries offered

us, that we should not withhold our good offices even from our enemies. Rom. xii. 20, 21.—“If thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” If any should wound you with injuries, meet them with patience: soft words heal the wound, forgiveness cures it, and oblivion takes away the scar.

But we are by no means obliged to take our enemies into our bosoms, and to give them a second opportunity to hurt us: this can never be required: and, though we are directed to “turn the other cheek to him that smites us, and to give our cloak to him who takes our coat,” yet I think we cannot take these passages in a literal sense; but suppose they mean only that we should submit to such injuries as these,—nay, suffer a repetition of them,—rather than endeavour to gain redress by applying to the law. In this sense it may be reasonable, and as fit to be inculcated at this day as it was in the time of the apostles: for I suppose that there are as great expenses, delays, and inconveniencies of every kind, in the prosecution of law-suits, now, as there were in those days.

We are to forgive our enemies, we are not to injure them, and, if opportunity offer, we are bound to do them good: yet a proper distinction should be made between our enemies and our innocent friends and neighbours, in order that virtue and goodness may be encouraged, and vice and ingratitude be put out of countenance. Upon the whole, it seems unreasonable to *command* either *love* or *belief*; for the former

must be created by something amiable in an object, and the latter is a necessary consequence of sufficient evidence. Hence it follows that, to some persons, such parts of Scripture want explanation.

## Chap. II.

### OF PRAYER FOR OUR FELLOW-CREATURES.

I. TIM. ii. 1, 3, 4.—I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

THIS duty naturally arises from the love of our fellow-creatures, and is a mode of expressing our affection for them. Nothing can be more natural than to pray for ourselves. Creatures who acknowledge a dependence on a superior Being, and who are conscious that this being is able and ready to assist them, will naturally pray to him. If, then, it is our duty to love our neighbours as ourselves, it is also natural that we should pray for them. Here I cannot but observe, how happy it is for mankind that they are conscious of the existence of a Being possessed of infinite power and wisdom; and that this wise and powerful Being is their father, friend, and benefactor. What wretches should we be in our distresses, when all human aid fails us, if we could not look up to that Being, “who is more ready to give than we are to ask?”

There is, besides, one great advantage in prayer, both to ourselves and to others, which is not often



attended to ; viz. that it tends to fit and prepare our minds for the discharge of social duties. It therefore becomes a social duty, and properly finds a place here : for though we cannot, by prayer, any way affect the determinations of God, which are always guided by unerring rectitude, or draw him nearer to us, we shall most certainly draw ourselves nearer to him, by being thereby better prepared to make ourselves and our fellow-creatures happy. This, at the same time, is also the best way of expressing our love to God, who cannot himself gain any thing by our services. Neither our virtues nor our vices can possibly affect his happiness, he being infinitely perfect and happy in himself.

When we adore the majesty of the Creator of heaven and earth, we must certainly be humbled, from a consideration of the infinite difference that there is between him and us.

When we beg of God the forgiveness of our sins, we naturally beg of him to dispose our minds to forgive our fellow-creatures ; and when we pray to God to grant us those things which he sees fit and convenient for us, we shall naturally be disposed to grant to others those good things which we have in our power to bestow.

Thus the virtues of humility, forgiveness, and charity, are encouraged and improved in our minds by prayer, and we are thereby made better members of society, and fitter objects of the favour of God. As a person in a boat, when he has cast his anchor on a rock, pulls as if he would pull the rock to him, though all the while he is pulling himself to the rock,



—so it is with us when we make our addresses to God, our hope, our trust, “and the rock of our salvation.” He never withdraws himself from his creatures, though they often withdraw themselves from him. He made us to be happy; and if we are not so, taking in the whole of our existence, it will be our own fault.

### Chap. III.

#### OF CHARITY.

THIS also is a duty naturally flowing from that affection for our fellow-creatures which God hath implanted in our minds. I shall divide charity into two branches, as it is divided in the New Testament, where it is excellently well explained and distinguished.

The first of which I shall take notice is by far the most noble and disinterested: I mean that candid and benevolent disposition of mind which inclines us not only to *forgive*, but also to throw a veil over, the faults and imperfections of our fellow-creatures.

That this is a natural branch of charity, appears from our constantly feeling, in our own minds, a desire that our faults should be thus forgiven and concealed. But the language of the New Testament is so beautiful and striking, that nothing more need be said to recommend this branch of charity; or to distinguish it from *alms-giving*, which is the second branch to be considered.

Hear what St. Paul says on this interesting subject. I. Cor. xiii. from the 1st to the 9th verse:—“ Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long and is kind, charity envyeth not, charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.” Verse 13:—“ And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” Coloss. iii. 14:—“ And, above all things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

What a noble and animated description hath St. Paul here given us of this most exalted virtue! It warms the heart, and strikes on the mind with almost irresistible force. Without this, the other virtues lose their value, and are held to be of little or no account.

The other branch of charity, which I have proposed

to consider, is that of relieving the distresses of our fellow-creatures, by giving them alms.

This also is a natural virtue, is pleasing to God, and is strongly recommended in the New Testament. Yet this virtue should not be exerted without caution. Our reason, in this, as well as in every thing else, should be taken for our guide: otherwise this branch of charity may degenerate into weakness,—nay, sometimes prove an injury to society. This branch of charity, though inferior to the other, is, if practised under the guidance of reason, a benefit to society; but, when otherwise, it may cease to be a virtue.

We often relieve objects to relieve ourselves: the object strikes us disagreeably, and hence we naturally desire the removal of the uneasy sensation it occasions. But, though it be good to cherish such a sympathetic disposition, and though a feeling heart is the source of the social virtues, yet there is no virtue in relieving such an object: on the contrary, if he should be a cheat, an improper object of our charity, it may prove an encouragement to idleness and common beggary. This uneasy sensation, which the distresses of our fellow-creatures create in every feeling mind, is the reason why objects of this sort present themselves in the streets, and public places, in the most disagreeable and shocking manner,—sometimes by exposing real disorders, and often by exhibiting disgusting appearances, which have been created by art, in order to extort your charity. Thus is the state injured, by keeping, without labour, many who might be very useful to it. Yet this is not the only evil that attends the promiscuous giving of alms

in the street: for the tender-hearted of both sexes often suffer by it,—especially the female, in whom the consequences are sometimes fatal; and a child, then unborn, is rendered unhappy by it all its life, as well as its parents. Beggars experience the effects of such appearances on tender minds, and are thereby encouraged to pursue this abominable practice.

Another thing which often lessens the virtue of alms-giving, is the ostentation of it. This was so common in the time of the apostles, that they guarded mankind against it, by shewing its meanness, and that it did not proceed from a right principle.

We are also taught to give with a cheerful heart; for there can be no virtue in an act of this sort, if it be done grudgingly, and with an unwilling mind. But I will give you the words of the New Testament, which are very full, and to the purpose. Matt. vi. 1, 2, 3, 4:—"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, that they may have glory of man. But, when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; that thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly." Matt. v. 42:—"Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow turn not thou away." II. Cor. ix. 7:—"Every man, according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, nor of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."



## Chap. IV.

### OF HONESTY.

**EPHES. iv. 28.**—Let him that stole, steal no more ; but rather let him labour, working with his hands, the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

**ROM. xiii. 7, 13.**—Render therefore to all their dues, &c.

**ROM. xii. 17.**—Recompense no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

**I. PET. ii. 12.**—Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles.

**HEB. xiii. 18.**—Pray for us, for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

**I. THESS. iv. 6, 12.**—That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified, that ye may walk honestly to them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

**HONESTY** implies purity of heart, a love of justice and integrity, and is the very opposite of deceit and fraud. It is a duty of great extent ; it is a natural duty ; and it is strongly recommended in the New Testament. The happiness of mankind depends very much on the practice of this duty, and human laws severely punish the breach of it. It is unnecessary to define common honesty, since every one knows what that is, and every one wishes that all others would practise it, how much soever he may neglect it himself. This proves it to be a natural duty, and of universal obligation.

By the term honesty, I would be understood to mean something more than the barely doing what the laws of our country require of us ; for, in this limited sense, it may be accompanied with many vices. A man with a very bad heart may, in this sense, be an honest man. A covetous man will choose to appear

in this character, because it will make him thrive the better in the world. It is policy in him ; for it creates a trust and dependance on him, which he makes use of to his advantage : while the man who has the character of being dishonest is shunned, and his business fails. Yet, at the same time that a covetous man pays every one his due, so far as the law obliges him, he may be cruel, envious, revengeful, uncharitable, hypocritical, and the like. Honesty, in a more extended sense, is a principle of the heart, which will always prevent our taking any undue advantage of our neighbour, though ever so much in our power, and without the chance of a discovery. Honesty (in the sense Mr. Pope takes it, when he says, " An honest man's the noblest work of God,") must border upon honour and generosity, and in this light I would here speak of it.

A truly honest man will suffer no profit to tempt him, no pleasure to entice him, no privacy to embolden him, deliberately to say or do a thing that would injure his neighbour, either in his fortune or his good name.

However, I think it must be allowed that the term *honest* does not convey to us an idea of exalted virtue ; and that, notwithstanding what Mr. Pope says, it seems, at best, to be a sort of negative one, or the not doing of ill.

Common honesty does not seem to require an exertion of our abilities in the service of mankind ; but rather an abstinence from injuring them. Go beyond this, and we call it generosity, charity, or some other virtue.

Honesty is a duty which we owe to our fellow-creatures. They may rightfully claim it from us, and human laws support their claim: but generosity is voluntary, uncompelled, noble in itself, and admired by the world.

Upon the whole, though honesty be an indispensable duty, of which the laws of nature, of Christ, and of almost every country, require the practice; yet it does not well deserve the name of *virtue*.

## Chap. V.

### OF SINCERITY.

JOHN, viii. 44.—You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him: when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar and the father of it.

EPHES. iv. 25.—Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth to his neighbour; for we are members one of another.

COLLOSS. iii. 9.—Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.

JAMES, iii. 14.—Lie not against the truth.

REVEL. xxi. 27.—And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.

SINCERITY is a virtue of great consequence to the happiness of mankind; and, as the neglect of it is not punishable by human laws, the greater purity of heart, and the higher sense of its being a duty, founded in the nature of things by the God of truth, are requisite to enforce the practice of it. Some, indeed, have thought that this duty may be insisted on with too much severity, and that there are cases in which a relaxation of it would be far from being a vice: nay, some go so far as to assert that deceit



may, in some cases, be substituted in the room of sincerity, consistent with virtue, with the happiness of society, and with the laws of God. I cannot subscribe to this opinion: for, though much may be said in favour of deceit in some particular cases, yet I think we may venture to assert, that, if truth and sincerity were universally to prevail, it would be infinitely better for society; and that the good arising from thence would vastly outweigh the partial evil which might sometimes be prevented by deceit and dissimulation. But, as this is a subject of great consequence, I shall consider it farther, and give the argument in favour of lying all its force. There is, I think, but one; viz.—“That it is the common practice of mankind; and that, if you were steadily to adhere to truth, you would be under great disadvantages in your dealings with others.”\*

I am sorry to say, that there is too much truth in this argument: but the commonness of a vice does not make it less a vice; nor is this a good argument in its favour. We should not be ashamed to stand single in the cause of truth, though all the world opposed it. I am, indeed, amazed when I consider how much the vice of lying prevails among the professions and employments of life: but yet I still persevere in my opinion that it is a vice, and inconsistent with the happiness of society. But, before I proceed to shew the commonness of this vice, I must premise that *lies may be acted as well as told*; for deceit is

\* Carneades proved, by many examples, that the condition of mankind is such that, if they have a mind to be just, they must act foolishly.—BAYLE, p. 862, art. *Carneades*.



the crime, whether in word or action. That I may give this argument for lying all its weight, I shall consider the common practice of it by those who are in general styled the better sort of people, and shall speak of *church-lies*, *law-lies*, *physic-lies*, *army-lies*, *trade-lies*, and *conversation-lies*.

The priests of every religion (*but ours*) live upon the ignorance of the laity, by inventing oracles, miracles, prodigies, mysteries, sacrifices, holy-water, holy-cakes, and the like. By these inventions they grow rich and powerful, and make great gain of what they call *the word of God*. They persuade you that these things are a part of true religion; when, according to the dictates of reason and nature, and very often, too, of their own hearts, nothing can be more opposite to it. The pure religion of nature and of Christ is locked up in impenetrable darkness, and the priests keep the key. It is blended with mysteries, which they are to explain, as best suits their interests; and the whole must be swallowed together, or it will not take off the taint of original sin, and save us from eternal damnation. Thus do the priests lie to the laity. These are what are called *pious frauds*, and what mankind are taught to believe innocent. These religious lies are, doubtless, very common.

The *lawyer* makes an interest of burying reason and common sense under a load of *quibble* and *chicanery*. He undertakes causes, be they ever so bad, and makes his client pay largely for a repetition of words which have no meaning, but to swell the expense of draughts and engrossings. At the bar, the counsel glosses over the cause of his client, and, by

a pomp of words (in which many fair characters are often shamefully traduced,) and an important air, deceives the jury into a good opinion of a very bad cause : at least, he attempts to do it ; and this he is so far from being ashamed of, that he glories in the deceit. This, too, is common.

The *doctor*, with a large wig, and a look of great importance, deceives his patient into an opinion of his judgment. He prescribes, takes his fee, and retires,—conscious, very often, that it is not in his power to give the patient any relief. In slight disorders, the efficacious medicine is delayed, lest the patient should grow well too soon ; and all the merit of the prescription, in violent and inveterate maladies, consists in its not doing any harm. Thus we are deceived by the skilful, or cheated out of our money and life by the quack.

In the *army*, where the telling of a lie is looked upon as a meanness not to be forgiven, and the giving a lie (according to the laws of honour) is punishable with death ;—I say, even in the army, lies are both told and acted, under certain circumstances, without the least disgrace or infamy. Deceit in war is gloried in, and called by the specious names of superior skill, art, and conduct. This is common, and by many thought innocent ; for they tell us, *that our enemies have no right to truth and fair dealing*. In many cases this may be true : but there are instances\* where deceit even to enemies has been looked on as cruel, and not to be justified.

\* Of this kind is an instance of deceit mentioned by some author, and thought to be extremely cruel, viz.—that of ships entering an

In *trade*, all the little arts made use of to deceive the buyer, and give goods an appearance of being better than they really are, are also a species of lies. An artful set of words, which some are very dexterous at, is of great use in trade. High shutters keep out the light of the sun, and false lights are introduced to hide the defects in the commodity. Thus the tradesman lies, both in words and actions. This also is common.

There is, in almost all employments and professions, some deceit, which mankind never reproach themselves with, because it is a common practice.

The *priest* would think himself a false brother, if he did not carry on the cheat in concert with others of the same profession.

The *lawyer* excuses himself by laying the blame on the intricacy and uncertainty of the law, and on the ignorance and litigious disposition of mankind.

The *physician*, who deceives you in common practice, probably would not cheat you any other way, though he were sure to do it with impunity.

The *captain*, who inserts false names in his muster-roll, and receives *pay* for them, without shame, would probably be ashamed of any other kind of cheat ;—and

The *tradesman*, who would deceive you by false lights and false words, might scruple to pick your pocket any other way.

Thus, particular kinds of deceit seem to be enemy's harbour under the appearance of distress, and, having gained the confidence and assistance of the tender-hearted inhabitants, have taken an opportunity to massacre them.



rised by custom. But let it be remembered that nature makes no such exception, nor can the God of truth be deceived, though men may.

But there are lies of another kind, which also, from common practice, are thought innocent : I mean those which are told in common conversation, where characters are wounded, perhaps with no other view than to keep up the chat, and enliven the discourse. These lies are worse than any of the former, in proportion as a person's reputation is dearer to him than any thing else. The licentious tongue pierces like a two-edged sword, or like a poisoned arrow, whose wound cannot be healed. These lies are thought innocent, because no harm was intended by them, and they were told only to keep up conversation. But how fatal are such conversations to the peace and happiness of society!

There are other conversation-lies, less injurious than any of the fore-mentioned, made use of to raise mirth in company; such as telling improbable romantic stories, to make some stare, and others laugh. These, too, though less criminal, are far from being innocent, and are condemned both by reason and the New Testament. They are very idle and ridiculous, and a shame to rational beings.

We have but a short time for acting our parts on the stage of life: let us, therefore, improve it to the best advantage: let us behave so that we may find pleasure in pursuing the path ourselves, and in pointing out to others the road to rational happiness. Let us remember that the tongue is intended to be a fair and honest interpreter of the heart; but that to



interpret wrong, is sinning against the law of nature and of reason, and will have its due reward, in this or in some other state, if a God of truth governs the world.

In all the cases which I have mentioned, excepting the last, not only the law of truth, but the law of honesty, is violated; and, however men may satisfy themselves, from the common practice of such deceit, they may be assured, that every breach of the law of sincerity tends to degrade human nature, and to sink it below the dignity of rational. Hence, however we may account for it to ourselves, we shall not be able to give a good account of it to a Being of infinite purity, who cannot behold deceit but with abhorrence.

The law of virtue is immutable, and to lie is sinning against that law. The liar must be a very bad member of society; for he withholds from his brethren what they have a most rightful claim to.

I shall now consider that kind of lie which is in general esteemed innocent, and rather to be ranked among the virtues than among the crimes:—I mean when we are so critically circumstanced, that, by deceiving a villain, we may preserve the property or life of an honest man. Many, indeed, will not except this circumstance; and they argue thus—“We are never to do evil in order that good may arise out of it, because the evil done is certain and irrevocable, but the good may never arise out of it; for we are sure only of the present moment, nor can we know what may happen in the next. The evil which we imagine will be prevented by the lie may never happen,

though we should tell the truth. A lie is a *certain evil*, and never should be told in order to produce an *uncertain good*. The Sovereign of the universe hath established the law of truth, and hath certainly so ordered it that a steady, uniform, perfect, and full obedience to this law will be most productive of happiness. He is the God of truth, and on him we may cheerfully depend, for his care and protection, while we continue in the performance of our duty. Sincerity and truth are necessary to recommend us to the favour of God, and to give us a just title to present and future happiness." Thus far the advocates for truth under every, even this extraordinary, circumstance. Let us now hear the reasons offered on the contrary side ; and I believe they will be found conclusive, because they are entirely consistent with the law of nature.

A man may forfeit his right to truth, by his becoming a violent member of society. This, I apprehend, the laws of self-defence and self-preservation admit ; otherwise, you will not perform the duties which you owe to your own family or country, but offer up your own right, and the rights of the community, as a sacrifice to unjust violence, and to an enthusiastic notion of the obligation of truth and sincerity. If a man be a peaceable member of society, it remains, so long as he continues such, a truth that *he has a right to life*, and therefore it would be a crime to kill him : but, if he seek to rob me, or kill me, or to rob or kill any innocent member of society, this truth, in such case, ceases from the moment that he becomes a violent member of society. The

violence of an enemy, which incites him to destroy me, cuts off, in the same manner, his right to narrative truth;—nay, to all truth, whether by signs, by actions, or by words; as much as a robbery cuts off a man's right to life.

I would except here truths which relate to the re-establishment of order, justice, peace, and satisfaction for injuries done; in all which cases, by the law of nations, truth is sacredly to be observed. Thus drums, trumpets, flags of truce, &c. are to be treated as friends; truth is to be observed, and faith to be kept with them, unviolated.

We have a right, from the law of self-defence, to secure our lives when attacked, even by homicide. Yet such homicide is a contradiction of truth by action. If it be asked, how comes it that we have a right to contradict such truth? I answer, the violence of the party has annihilated his right to truth, which existed before. Now, if we may commit homicide to oppose or evade violence, how much more have we a right to deliver, knowingly, sounds which do not agree with our ideas of things, in order to procure our own safety, or the safety of others? We can no more lie to an enemy, than we can lie to a post or to a madman. This seems extremely clear, and proves that deceit is far from being a vice in such extraordinary cases.



## Chap. VI.

## OF CONVERSATION.

MATT. xii. 36.—But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

II. COR. i. 12.—For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.

EPHES. iv. 29.—Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth ; but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.

EPHES. v. 3, 4.—But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you ; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jestings, which are not convenient : but rather giving of thanks.

COLL. iv. 6.—Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how to answer every man.

I. THESS. v. 11.—Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another.

HERE we see how strongly the New Testament recommends the care of our conversation. This is a natural and a social duty, of great extent and consequence ; and it very properly follows the article Sincerity, with which, indeed, it is connected. The tongue should always be under a proper guard, for it is capable of producing much evil. No conversation can be innocent if it deviates from truth, which should, in my opinion, be held sacred and inviolable in every instance, but that extraordinary one mentioned in the preceding chapter. But the speaking of things which are strictly true is not all that is required under this important article. We should not be fond of discovering the vices and follies of our neighbours, even though we may do it consistent with truth. Charity, as hath been already made appear, should teach us to throw a veil over the faults



and follies of others ; and, unless we can speak in their favour, they ought not to be the subject of our conversation.

We should always be ready to vindicate the reputation of the absent, and not, as is too common, out of a false complaisance to the speaker, assent to all he says, and appear to believe it, when, in our hearts, we are of a different opinion : for this is a species of lying. It betrays a mean abject spirit, to swim down the stream of discourse, and not to exert oneself in opposing a torrent of scandal : for this shews great want of resolution, if not of generosity ; and is a breach of the law of nature, because we should think it hard to be thus treated, in the same circumstances.

Conversation should not only be free from scandal and falsehood, but it should tend to promote friendship and a good opinion of one another. It is amazing that the relating of a good and virtuous action of a neighbour should not be as pleasing as scandal.

I have always a very mean opinion of those who delight in traducing the characters of others ; and almost as bad a one of those who encourage conversation of this sort. How degenerate and base is it to believe with eagerness a story which wounds the reputation of another, even without hesitating a moment to enquire whether it be true or false ; and yet be slow and cautious in believing a relation of a good and virtuous action.

“ On eagles’ wings immortal scandals fly,  
Whilst virtuous actions are but born to die.”

STEPNEY’S *Juvenal*.

Are you sure that this is true? is a common question, if praise be the subject; but hardly ever asked if the topic be scandal. How common, too, is it for people, when they are well assured of the truth of a relation in praise of another, to use great art, and take great pains, to throw an alloy into the composition of a good character, in order to lower it to their own base standard!

This is a shocking picture of human nature, and I am sorry to exhibit it; but I do it in order to prevent the spreading of an evil, which (though this is very surprising) is frequently practised by persons of, otherwise, a good disposition.

Conversation should also be free from whatever may offend or disgust: nothing coarse or immodest, —nothing that would wound an ear, or raise a blush on a cheek,—ought to be admitted in polite company, but should be looked upon as the highest degree of ill manners.

“ But words obscene admit of no pretence;

For want of decency is want of sense.” D. OF BUCK.

Our conversation should be useful and instructive. A discourse in praise of justice, charity, and benevolence, and of the advantages of a virtuous life, will tend to elevate the mind, and to give it a taste for pleasures of the rational kind, such as nature teaches, and God intended we should enjoy.

But I would not be thought to exclude wit and mirth from conversation: these may be introduced without lying, without scandal, and without obscenity.

Conversation may take a very gay and agreeable turn, and yet be consistent with virtue and innocence. Cheerfulness, indeed, may often depend upon constitution and a natural turn of mind; yet I cannot help ranking it among the virtues, as it contributes so much to the happiness of society.

## Chap. VII.

### OF FORGIVENESS.

MATT. vi. 14, 15.—For, if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But, if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.

MATT. xviii. 21, 22.—Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times; but until seventy times seven.

LUKE, vi. 37.—Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.

EPHES. iv. 31, 32.—Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from ye, with all malice; and be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

No duty can be enforced, or recommended, in a stronger manner than this is in the New Testament. Forgiveness of others is made the terms of our own forgiveness, and self-love will operate to enforce its practice. That it is a *natural duty*, and of universal obligation, is clear from the desire which we constantly feel in our own minds to be forgiven by others, when we are conscious of having done them an injury. If it be objected, that some men never desire a reconciliation, I answer, that there may be instances, though they are very rare, of men so hardened

as to be proof against these natural and rational desires ; but for such I do not write. Such beings as those are unfit for society, because social duties can have no place in unfeeling hearts. They are so much below human nature, that they can hardly be deemed an exception to this general rule.

Persons who have tender hearts, and who take in the claims of their fellow-creatures, will never be quite happy while they are unforgiven by others ; and hence it seems that they have learnt to *forgive*, from that most comprehensive and excellent rule—*of doing to others as we would they should do unto us*.

While two persons are at variance, and angry with each other, they cannot be quite happy on this account. Something still rankles at the heart, and destroys their peace of mind ; till sweet reconciliation pours in the balm of forgiveness, and entirely cures the wound.

This duty appeared to Christ to be of so much importance, that he enforced it (as I said before) in the strongest manner possible ; particularly in that prayer which he recommended for general use, and which is so calculated, that we cannot pray to God, with propriety, for forgiveness, whilst we indulge an unforgiving disposition in ourselves. Christ well knew, from the study of human nature, how much the happiness of mankind depended on the practice of this duty ; and therefore formed his general prayer in the manner he did. But Christ has also strongly enforced this duty in the following words :—

Matt. v. 23, 24.—“ Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy



brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way : first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Here you see that, though you are about to pray,—though you are kneeling at the foot of the altar, ready to devote yourself to God,—yet you are to stop, leave your prayer unoffered, go your way, and first be reconciled to your brother : that is, to any one that you have injured ; for all mankind are your brethren. St. Mark justifies this explanation ; chap. xi. 25:—" And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any ; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." So that reconciliation must take place of anger and revenge before we can be proper objects of God's forgiving mercy.

## Chap. VIII.

### OF MERCY.

MATT. v. 7.—Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

MATT. ix. 13.—I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.

ROM. xii. 8.—He that sheweth mercy with cheerfulness.

COLLOS. iii. 12.—Put on therefore bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering.

JAMES, ii. 13.—He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy ; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

THIS duty is so connected with the foregoing, that it cannot well be separated. It likewise is proved to be a natural duty, and of eternal obligation, on the same principle ; namely,—*the strong desire of receiving mercy from others, which is implanted by nature*

*in the human mind.* To be merciful to our fellow-creatures is strongly recommended in the New Testament. To the laws of nature and the laws of Christ, we may add the example of God himself; which last, surely, will have great weight with every rational mind. Mercy is his darling attribute. Let us imitate, as near as possible, this infinitely perfect pattern, and be merciful, in proportion to our abilities, "as our heavenly Father is merciful." To be merciful to our fellow-creatures is the best way that we have in our power of expressing our gratitude to God for his mercy to us. What can be more noble? What can tend more to exalt human nature, and to promote the happiness of the universe, than an humble imitation of that Being, "who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works?"

If unhappy experience did not prove that the fact is so, we should be astonished to find a rational being in the world void of mercy.

How can a being, conscious of his dependance on the mercy of God for his existence and all the blessings he enjoys, be unmerciful to his fellow-creatures? A cruel rational being is a greater monster, and more to be dreaded and detested than the most fierce and noxious animal in the brute creation. There is something in cruelty so opposite to the divine attributes of wisdom and goodness, and so destructive of the benevolent plan of the God of mercy, that some have been led to wonder how such creatures as intelligencies without mercy could find a place under the government of an infinitely wise, just, and powerful Being; and that they fall not a sacrifice to the divine

vengeance, and be not destroyed from off the face of the earth."

To quiet the minds and silence the enquiries of such, let them consider that this and every other world which God hath made, and all the creatures which inhabit them, are as perfect in their kind as it is possible for them to be. If we had capacities to receive it, and God had thought proper to communicate to us the whole plan of his creation and government, we should reverence the power, admire the wisdom, and gratefully acknowledge the goodness; which would abundantly shine forth in that stupendous whole. But, as our capacities are very much limited, and we can comprehend only a small part of the infinite plan, it is no wonder that we should form so imperfect a judgment about it.

Take the whole of our existence together, it must certainly be happy: else a being of infinite goodness would not have given it us. Our task is, to endeavour all in our power to make ourselves and others happy, and therefore to *overcome evil with good*; to be bright and shining examples of benevolence and charity, forgiveness and mercy, in order that others may catch the heavenly flame, and kindle into goodness.

## Chap. IX.

## OF PUNISHMENTS.

ROM. ii. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.—Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality; eternal life. But unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath: tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that doeth good; for there is no respect of persons with God.

It may be thought odd in me to insert this article where I am treating of the social duties; and still more so that I should do it in this place,—thereby making punishments tread, as it were, on the heels of mercy and forgiveness. But I believe I shall be excused, as it must appear of importance to the happiness of mankind to have their punishments regulated by reason, and by the example of God himself, who cannot err.

Punishments ordained by God are always founded in mercy, and are intended to answer a kind and beneficent purpose towards his creatures; for an infinitely perfect Being can have no other end to answer.

Human beings sometimes torment one another out of wantonness, and often punish to indulge and gratify a cruel disposition. Sometimes they punish wrongfully, either from ignorance and deception, or from a defect in human laws, or in their own judgments, *in not proportioning the punishment to the crime*; and sometimes (indeed, too often,) they punish out of revenge: neither of which can be the case with God, who hath no passions to gratify, and



whose laws, being founded in infinite and eternal wisdom, are consequently calculated only to support a boundless, infinite, and sempiternal system of benevolence.

The laws of nature, which can have no defect, generally annex the punishment to the crime ; and it often takes place immediately. *Infamy* is a consequence of *fraud* ; *poverty*, of *extravagance* and *imprudence* ; *disease*, of *intemperance* and *debauchery* ; and so of many others. In truth, it seems to be one of God's most wise and general laws, founded in eternal justice and mercy, that every vice should necessarily produce, and be the natural cause of, its own punishment. These punishments are evidently ordained, upon the whole, to promote our happiness. They are the thorns which grow in the paths of vice ; which serve to check us, to make us look about, and examine whether we are in the road of reason and nature,—the only road to true and permanent happiness,—or in that which leads to present and future misery.

God always punishes in the character of a kind parent ; intending thereby to reform our manners, cure our vicious habits, and bring us back to the paths of virtue and happiness ; from which, by neglecting the guidance of reason, we have shamefully strayed.

With this benevolent intention does the Almighty Father of the universe punish his offspring ; and this should teach mankind how infinitely far removed all kinds of resentment and revenge must be from him ; and, consequently, that *eternal* punishments can never

take place under the government of a Being who made creatures in order to render them happy. From our most approved ideas of the infinitely perfect God, I think we may fairly conclude, that, if he had foreseen that any one being would have acted in such manner as to have rendered itself eternally miserable, he never would have brought such creature into existence. Infinite mercy would have interposed to prevent such a creation. We may readily allow that the foreknowledge of God does not influence the actions of men; yet this must likewise be admitted, that no power in earth or heaven could make that being eternally happy whom God foreknew would be eternally miserable: the bare supposition of the contrary implies a manifest contradiction. A just, merciful, and good Being cannot punish out of revenge; and much less can he take vengeance for ever.

God cannot, consistently with the rectitude of his nature, punish undeservedly, or more than in an exact proportion to the crime, though he may in a less proportion. St. Paul says above, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds:"—but this must not be understood to exclude his mercy. This is another evident proof that punishment cannot be eternal; for the punishing only one single being to eternity would be more than adequate to the evil of all the crimes which ever have been, and ever will be, committed in this world by all mankind.

I think it almost impossible to entertain an idea of a good and merciful Being punishing another being, the work of his own hands, with extreme misery only

for the space of one hundred thousand years, which, compared to eternity, is a point—a moment—the hundred thousandth part of a moment.

Again, God punishes in order to cure; which is also inconsistent with the notion of eternal punishment. The good, the happiness, of creatures cannot be produced by eternal punishments; but quite the reverse: and yet there was no motive, conceivable by us, for God to bring creatures into being but to make them happy, taking in the whole of their existence.

I could bring many other arguments to prove that eternal torments, for temporary faults, are inconsistent with the attributes of God: but my intention was principally to consider the punishments inflicted on mankind by one another; and, in prosecuting this, to recommend the example of the infinitely perfect God to our imitation, as far as possible.

God punishes without resentment, without revenge, in a proportion not exceeding the crimes, and in order to promote the future happiness of his creatures. In this, as nearly as we can, let us imitate our infinitely perfect pattern.

Let the punishments which we inflict be always tempered with mercy, and be intended to make the person better and happier for the future. This is the true end of punishment, and the aim of all good beings, who will also constantly distinguish between errors and crimes.



## Chap. X.

## OF GOOD EXAMPLE.

MATT. v. 16.—Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

I. TIM. iv. 12.—But be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

THIS is a duty which we owe to our fellow-creatures and to our ourselves, and of which nature requires the performance ; because it is the will of God that all his creatures should be happy, and good examples tend very much to promote this general happiness.

If virtue tend to increase the happiness of mankind, it is good that it should universally prevail ; and nothing can more effectually promote the practice of virtue than good examples.

Every man has it, more or less, in his power to be an example of virtue ; and, though he may not be able to write or to preach, his example may do more than both. It is a very important duty to society to display virtue in her brightest colours, because, when she is seen, she will be beloved.

From different situations and abilities, some men can contribute more than others, by example, to the practice of virtue : but it is in the power of every one to bear a part, and to represent virtue in action, only by being virtuous himself.

The examples of persons in exalted stations will always have the greatest influence, and contribute most to the practice of virtue. Private persons may shine, but their spheres are contracted, and they are seen only by few ; but it is of great benefit to a nation



to have a prince on the throne eminent in every virtue, and, from his exalted station, shining forth like the sun in his meridian lustre. He is seen by all, and all must feel the influence of his bright example. Virtue herself seems to receive additional beauty from the practice of good princes, and to become almost irresistible. The impulse is communicated to the hearts of the subjects, and they grow ambitious to imitate their king.—Happy the people, who are in such a case! Happy Britons! this is your lot! Your king\* sets before you a shining example of piety towards God, as well as of filial, fraternal, conjugal, and paternal affection. This last virtue, to his everlasting honour, he extends to his subjects. God hath given him one of his choicest blessings—a feeling heart; and, from this fountain of social virtue, flows to his people that paternal care for their happiness, which is the characteristic of a good prince. Follow, O Britons! the example of your sovereign:—“then judgment will run down your streets like water, and righteousness as a mighty stream.”

The prevalence of example is known to all; and therefore it is the duty of all to labour strenuously to give the best they can. The voice of reason calls loudly for it, and Christ and his apostles strongly recommend it.

\* George III. in 1765.

## Chap. XI.

## OF PARTIALITY.

JAMES, ii. 4, 9.—Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts : but, if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

I. TIM. v. 21.—I charge thee, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things, without preferring one before another; doing nothing by partiality.

I. PET. i. 17.—And if we call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work.

THUS we are taught, in the New Testament, to avoid partiality : nature also teaches the same ; and both point out to us the example of the ever blessed God. Nature teaches us that we are all the creatures of God, all children of the same kind parent, and that God can have no partiality.

One man may be happier than another in this life : even a wicked man may have many advantages which a good man may want ; nay, a good man may suffer many miseries here, without having any reason for arraigning the goodness of God ; for the account may, perhaps, remain to be balanced in another state. Besides, there is not any thing in which we are so often mistaken as in the judgment which we form of the happiness or unhappiness of others. Honours, titles, and great possessions, are not certain marks of happiness : the disappointed ambition of a great man will make him more unhappy than absolute poverty will render another man. We are dissatisfied complaining creatures, and do not perceive that God, in his infinite wisdom and mercy, hath made a more equal distribution of happiness than mankind are in

general aware of. The want of the conveniencies of life is often compensated by a hardy constitution and a contented mind; while the man who is possessed, not only of the conveniencies, but of the superfluities and luxuries of life, is often afflicted with a weak and bad constitution, and a discontented aching heart, which devour his happiness.

This, however, we know,—this nature teaches us,—that God, standing in the same relation to all intelligent beings who inhabit this globe, must be equally concerned for the happiness of every one; and, therefore, that it must be a reflection on his moral character to suppose that he hath any favourites but those who render themselves such by good and virtuous actions. We are likewise taught this by the New Testament, where it is frequently inculcated “that God is no respecter of persons.” How far this is consistent with the account in the Old Testament of God’s making choice of the Jews from among all mankind, and regarding them as his peculiar people; of his being immediately and locally present in their armies; and of his leading them on to conquer and distress their fellow-creatures, who (for aught that appears to the contrary) had an equal claim, as his offspring, to his fatherly care and protection;—how far, I say, this is consistent with the New-Testament account of the impartiality and universal benevolence of God to all his creatures, I must leave to others to determine. For my part, I cannot reconcile it with his not being a respecter of persons.

I own that this infinitely perfect pattern is, in this particular, too bright for us to imitate in any tolerable

degree. We find it extremely difficult to divest ourselves of partiality for our friends; nay, I do not know that the law of nature requires that we should: but it most certainly requires that we should never sacrifice truth or virtue out of a partial regard to any person whatever,—not even to ourselves: for nature makes no exceptions, nor allows of any one case in which this law may be violated with impunity. If we are commanded to love ourselves, and to love our neighbours, we are bound to love God and virtue more than both.

## Chap. XII.

### OF HYPOCRISY.

MATT. vi. 2, 5.—Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men: verily, I say unto you, they have their reward. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men: verily, I say unto you, they have their reward.

MARK, xii. 38.—Beware of the scribes, who love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market-place.

LUKE, xi. 44.—Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.

THUS did Christ caution his disciples against the vice of hypocrisy. Nature also teaches us its abject meanness. It generally marks a coward, and is a species of lying, which the laws of truth and virtue sufficiently condemn; as I have proved under the article Sincerity. How much below the dignity of human nature is it for a man to appear what he is



not!—the virtuous and good man can never desire this. Truth will always bear the light ; and the more it is examined, the brighter it will shine. “ Like purest gold, when tortured in the furnace, it comes out more bright, and brings forth all its weight.” But falsehood and fraud always shun the light, or put on the mask of honesty and truth.

Of all kinds of hypocrisy, that in religion seems the worst. It is trifling with what is sacred, and making a mock of the most solemn and interesting thing in the world ; and yet the hypocrite certainly pays a compliment to religion, and insinuates its usefulness. He puts on the religious garb, as being that which, most probably, will make him pass upon the world for a good man. The character of a religious man creates esteem and veneration ; and therefore it is put on by the wicked, to aid their deceit, and that they may the better impose on the virtuous. To suppose that the sacred character of religion should ever be profaned is so shocking to a good man, that he can hardly suspect any one to be capable of it ; and therefore he is the more easily deceived.

But be it remembered that, though an external appearance of sanctity may impose upon men, (and so far the hypocrite may have his reward,) yet God cannot be deceived, nor will he be mocked.

We can put on no veil but what his omniscience can penetrate ; for he searcheth the hearts, and trieth the thoughts of the children of men.

## Chap. XIII.

## OF DUTIES TO SUPERIORS.

**ACTS**, xxiii. 5.—For it is written, thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

**ROM.** xiii. from the 1st to the 8th verse.—Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. For virtuous rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honour, to whom honour.

**TITUS**, iii. 1.—Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.

**I. PET.** ii. 13, 14.—Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.

**EPH.** vi. 5, 6, 7, 8.—Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters, according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to man; knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

**THIS** subject is treated of so copiously, and with so much propriety, in the New Testament, that very little more need be said about it here. A proper subordination is necessary to the good of society, and is founded in reason and nature.

But you owe your duty to superiors, not from their having a greater degree of merit, or of riches, than yourselves or other men, but from the office they bear in the community to which you belong; for these only are meant by superiors in the writings of the

Apostles. Magistrates, or your superiors in the state, may have less merit than yourselves ; but this by no means absolves you of your duty to them : if it did, all subordination and good government might soon be subverted ; for merit is far from always attending exalted stations. You are to submit to the ordinances of your superiors on account of the stations in which Providence hath placed them ; and, by doing this peaceably, you honour God and preserve the tranquillity of the state. If a magistrate is a bad man, his being so will lessen his influence, and have an effect on your internal regard for him : but, while he holds his office, you are obliged to obey all his *lawful commands* ; though it seems impossible that you should *honour* him, in any proper sense of the word honour.\* A master may be a bad man ; but this absolves not a servant from his duty to him. The servant is paid by his master, and therefore his labour becomes the property of his master : nay, the master has also a claim on the complaisance and good behaviour of a servant. It is a breach of the law of honesty to defraud a master of the former, and of the laws of good breeding to withhold the latter. God intends the happiness of *all*,—the lowest as well as the highest, the servant as well as the master ; and hence he requires from *all* a propriety of conduct, and the regular and due discharge of the duties of their stations. God is the great master of *all*, the

\* Some of the learned have thought that many of the precepts of *passive obedience*, copied from the New Testament in this chapter, are not genuine, but were introduced by men fond of power after the time of the Apostles.

sovereign Lord of the universe, the King of kings, and Lord of lords ; and with him there is no distinction but those of virtue and vice. He regards not the persons or situations of men : from whence it follows that, if the servant discharges properly the duties of his station, he will be entitled to the favour of God equally with the master.

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## Chap. XIV.

### OF DUTIES TO INFERIORS.

EPHES. vi. 9.—And ye, masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master also is in heaven ; neither is there any respect of persons with him.

COLLOS. iv. 1.—Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

LUKE, vii. 2, 3.—And a centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

THIS duty is evidently comprehended, as almost all our duties are, in the most comprehensive of all nature's rules ; viz.—*that of doing to others as we would they should do unto us, in the same circumstances.*

The due observance of this single rule will prevent your treating inferiors with disdain and contempt ; and much more so, your treating them with cruelty.

In the above-mentioned texts, from the New Testament, we are taught to consider, that, though we are superior to numbers, yet we have a Master in heaven, who, we may add, is infinitely more exalted above us than we are above the meanest of our vassals. This thought should tend to humble us, and



incline us to treat our inferiors with humanity and good-nature.

In the example of the centurion, we are taught that good servants should be dear to us, and that they are proper objects of our care and regard. We should always remember that it is, perhaps, owing to somewhat quite independent of us and them, that we are in an exalted, they in an humble, station: and, though Providence, or accident, hath occasioned the distinction in our favour, and placed us in the superior, they in the inferior, rank; yet, as men, they are our brethren, and children of the universal Father, who is as much concerned to promote their happiness as ours. Hence, by the law of God, we are bound to treat them properly, and to do them good offices.

The lowest state to which a man can be reduced does not exclude him from our regard as a man: he is a part of that *whole* which God made, to render all happy; and though, from his situation, he may owe his superiors a *particular* duty, his superior still owes him a *general* one.

If a servant properly discharges the duties of his station, the obligation becomes equal; “for the labourer is worthy of his hire.” Good servants are very useful members of society, and ought to be regarded as such: from whence it follows, that they should have all due encouragement given them; and this they have reason to expect.

But, farther, to keep our minds in a due frame, and incline us to the due discharge of the duties which we owe to inferiors, we should remember that death

puts a final period to all distinctions here ; and that, if our inferiors have behaved better in their stations than we have done in ours, they, in another state, may be exalted, and we may be abased.

It is but a very short time before the distinctions of this world will be at an end, and the only distinctions hereafter will be those of *right* and *wrong*, *good* and *bad*. Our riches, titles, and honours, all leave us in the grave ; but the consciousness of a well-spent life, with all its happy consequences, will be carried with us into another state, and be the foundation of future happiness.

Let us remember, also, how easy it is for persons in an exalted station to increase the happiness of their inferiors : a courteous smile, a kind look or word, will go a great way towards it. Look not down with disdain and contempt on the lowest rank ; but look up to God with a grateful heart, and thank him for the blessings of your own station. Exert your power and influence in the service of your fellow-creatures ; and this will be pleasing to God, who is no respecter of persons, and with whom riches and honours are of no account.

## Chap. XV.

### OF THE DUTIES OF PARENTS TO CHILDREN.

EPHES. vi. 4.—And ye, fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

COLLOS. iii. 21.—Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

II. COR. xii. 14.—For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.

I. TIM. v. 8.—But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

THAT the duties of parents to children are founded in nature and reason, I believe no one will deny. That they are agreeable to the doctrines of the New Testament, appears from what has been said above. I own that there is not much laid down there relative to these duties, and suppose that it was thought unnecessary to enforce duties of this kind; as reason, nature, and the infinitely perfect example of God himself, so strongly inculcate them. However, I shall consider what are the particular duties of parents to children, and the manner of discharging those duties so as best to promote the happiness of both.

First, then, it is the duty of parents to nourish, with the utmost care, their offspring, while in an infant state, before the tender plant hath taken root, and laid hold enough of life to support itself.

Secondly, it is the duty of parents to give their children a good education. This duty is of the utmost importance; as not only their happiness in this life, but also in a future state, may depend thereon.

Thirdly, it is the duty of parents to provide, as

well as they can, for the comfortable subsistence of their children in this world: and,

Fourthly, it is the duty of parents to be good examples to their children; which is a matter of very great consequence.

Children made happy by the discharge of these duties, cannot fail of having the most ardent affection for their parents, and of making them the most grateful returns in their power. On the other hand, children who are rendered unhappy by their parents' neglect of these duties, cannot possibly have so great an affection for them; nor can they be under the same obligations of gratitude, or of doing on their parts any thing to promote the happiness of such parents, any farther than as they are fellow-creatures. On the contrary, they may very properly address them according to the sentiment, though not exactly in the language, which Milton puts into the mouth of Adam:—"Did I request it of you, parents, to bring me into being? or am not I the unhappy consequence of your own gratifications? Nature, indeed, teaches you to propagate your species: but nature teaches you likewise to make them happy, as far as is in your power. Nature hath abundantly provided for the support of every creature; and one of her laws is, that parents shall contribute to the support and happiness of their offspring: hence every creature, but man, seems to obey her dictates. Will you, who boast the privilege of reason, and glory in being formed after the image of God;—will you, I say, be worse than the brute creation? Surely, since my will concurred not in producing my being, it is but



just that you should do all in your power to render happy that being which is the consequence of a regard for your own pleasures." These are natural reflections ; to prevent which, by taking away the cause, I shall now proceed to consider the duties before mentioned in their order. And

First, the duty of parents to nourish, with the greatest care and tenderness, their children, in their infant state.

This duty nature has, in a peculiar manner, assigned to the mother. If any will dispute this with me, let him or her tell me, why, as soon as the child is born, nature swells the mother's breasts with milk ; and why the new-born babe is taught, by instinct, to seek its nourishment from thence. These, I think, are irresistible proofs : but we may add to them the example of the brute creation. The beasts of the field almost invariably nourish and bring up their own young. But one would suppose that there cannot be any need to multiply arguments to induce mothers, whenever they are able, to nurse and suckle their own children ; as nature so loudly calls for it. Yet experience teaches us that the voice of nature is not always attended to ; that irregular passions are gratified at the expense of the most rational duties ; and that mothers (whose hearts, one would think, should be dilated, and every fibre softened, by maternal tenderness,) will consign their infants,—“those dear young limbs, those parts of their own flesh,”—to the care of a person, whose regard for them will be proportioned only to the profit of her employment. Hence, the milk of the *hired mother* must supply the

place of that with which nature has kindly provided the *real one*; and those fountains of life in the real mother are often unnaturally dried up, to the great prejudice of both mother and child: so dangerous is it to deviate from the laws of nature.

But it is not my design to write a dissertation on the duty of mothers to suckle their own children: my intention is only to prove it to be a *natural* duty; and I am sorry that, at the same time, I shall prove those to be unnatural mothers who neglect it for any of the pleasures and gratifications of the world.

It is, indeed, amazing that a mother should not readily sacrifice a few other pleasures to the welfare and happiness of her offspring; or, indeed, that she should find any equal to the communication of nourishment, of health, and of pleasure, to her child,—any pleasures equal to those which must arise from observing it to grow under her care; from seeing its little cheeks dimpled with smiles, and its eyes turned up to her, looking ineffable tenderness and gratitude. I say, it is amazing that a mother can find any pleasures equal to such as these. You mothers lose all this felicity who early put your children at a distance, and receive them back unknowing and unknown. Nay, as a judicious writer\* has observed, “they cannot be entirely yours; for the body which you see is more properly the nurse’s than your own: it was sent from you very young, and that loss of substance which every moment attends all animal bodies has been supplied entirely by the milk of a stranger,

\* The French author of a book entitled “Manners,” to whom I am obliged for some hints in this work.

which hath transformed it into a new child." I will not contend for the force of this author's argument: a better, I think, may be produced, viz.—that there is a mutual strong affection created by a mother's suckling her own child, and that this is hardly ever known without it; for the hired nurse engrosses the child's affection, and receives all those little endearments so likely to increase the fondness of the mother.

Many other arguments might be produced to prove the propriety of mothers suckling their own children, whenever they are able. However, there may be, and sometimes are, particular instances where it is necessary to provide the milk of another; and then the mother is to be pitied, not blamed.

Secondly, I am here to consider that it is the duty of parents to give their children a good education. Here, though every good mother will lend her assistance, yet nature hath principally assigned this task to the father, who is to take upon him more peculiarly the care of forming the thinking and immortal substance to virtue and happiness. This is a duty of infinitely more consequence than the former; it being much better for a child to die young, from the neglect of its body, than for it to live with an uncultivated mind. I do not pretend to give a plan for the education of children; but shall content myself with saying, let parents choose their own, and vary it, as circumstances vary. My business is only to enforce the duty of giving such an one as will best promote the glory of God, and the happiness of the child. This is the natural, the indispensable, duty of every parent.

But, though I shall not lay down particular rules for the education of children, I think I may venture to mention some things which should never be neglected. As early as the young mind will bear it, the child should be furnished with the knowledge of its duty towards God. It should be taught to consider God as a kind and good Being, who made it and every other intelligent creature, to render them happy; and, therefore, that it ought to love and honour this good Being. It should be taught that all mankind are its brethren,—the poor as well as the rich; and that, whatever it does towards making others happy, will be pleasing to God; that God will love it for such conduct, and will make it also happy; or, rather, that happiness flows naturally from the cultivation of such a benevolent temper of mind.

The young mind should by all means be kept humane; and an early abhorrence of every thing cruel, malicious, envious, or revengeful, should be implanted in it. The social virtues of patience, humility, integrity, sincerity, and the like, should be taught a child in its youth; from whence they will grow up into habits not to be eradicated. “Train up a child in the way that he should go, and, when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

Thirdly, it is the duty of parents to provide as well as they can for the comfortable subsistence of their children. In this case likewise, no general rule can be laid down, as it depends on a variety of circumstances; yet thus much I may venture to say, that, where parents cannot leave children independent fortunes, it is their indispensable duty to educate



them in such manner that they may, either by the labour of their hands, or in some of the learned professions, be able to support themselves with honour and integrity ; and that the neglect of this is a crime in parents, for which they will be accountable. At Athens, where the laws obliged children to relieve their necessitous parents, those were excused who had not been taught a trade.

Nature does not require that parents should deprive themselves of the necessities or conveniencies of life, in order to leave large fortunes to their children. This would be a fault in a parent, and might possibly prove a temptation and a snare to the children : yet nature certainly requires this care from parents, viz. —that they should enable their children to get their living in some honest employment ; for the neglect of this is often attended with very pernicious consequences.

If a young man be thrown upon the world without a fortune, or the means of supporting himself, he is generally betrayed into great meannesses,—if not into great vices : and for a young woman to be in this situation is much worse, especially if she be possessed of beauty ; for it is much if she do not give up her virtue and innocence to procure herself a support. Her beauty becomes a snare to her, and serves only to attract the eyes of those destroyers of innocence, who, with relentless hearts, will glory in the conquests they have made ; and, when they have gratified their sordid appetites, will abandon to grief and shame the person who so lately contributed to their pleasure. Parents who live to see this unhappy effect

of their inattention, are sufficiently punished in this life; and, if they are not, we can hardly suppose that they will escape it in another.

Fourthly,—it is the duty of parents to be good examples to their children.

I have already given an article on good examples in general, and have there considered the prevalency of example, and the claim which our fellow-creatures have on us for the discharge of this duty.

But, besides our general obligations as men, and as members of society, to shew good examples to others, in order that the happiness of the whole may be promoted thereby, children have a particular and stronger claim on parents: for, as these were the means of bringing them into being, they, of course, are under stronger obligations to promote their happiness.

I have already shewn the obligations of parents to take care of their children in their infant state; and of the mothers, in particular, to nurse and suckle them. I have likewise treated of the father's obligations to preside over their education, and to take care that it be a good one: as also of the duty of parents to provide for the comfortable subsistence of their children in the world, either by leaving them fortunes, or by enabling them to procure for themselves a decent support in an honest way, without being subject to the temptation of acting either meanly or viciously, in order to keep themselves from want.

I come now to shew the obligations both of father and mother to be good examples to their children.

Carefulness and industry are the two hands of

fortune, and probity and virtue are far beyond all fortune's gifts. Examples of the former will teach them soon to be independent of the world ; and the practice of the latter will tend to promote their happiness both here and hereafter, by gaining them the favour and good opinion of mankind, and also the approbation of him whose favour is better than life itself.

Be virtuous yourselves, parents, and your children will very probably follow your example : and, if they do so, they will likewise love you the better on that account.

The examples of parents have generally a great influence on the practice of children : hence parents are more accountable for the present and future happiness of their children than they may in general imagine. How must it wound the hearts of thinking parents to see a child unhappy through any want of care in them ! and still more so, if that unhappiness proceed from their own bad examples.

We are naturally apt to follow the examples of those whom we love and honour : therefore, the examples of parents will be very prevalent ; and hence this ought to keep them much upon their guard. All persons are under obligations to be virtuous ; but heads of states, and heads of families, are more peculiarly so, from the influence of their examples.

Thus have I drawn out this article to a considerable length ; but I hope that the importance of the subject, and its variety, will plead my excuse,—especially when it is considered how many parents there are in the world whose unfeeling hearts nature cannot



penetrate, nor make attentive to the happiness of any but themselves. Such cannot have their duties too strongly impressed upon their minds ; and it is for such that I have here written. Good parents want no incitements beyond those which reason and nature have implanted, in order to make their children happy.

## Chap. XVI.

### OF THE DUTIES OF CHILDREN TO PARENTS.

MATT. xv. 4.—For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and thy mother.

EPHES. vi. 1, 2.—Children, obey your parents in the Lord : for this is right. Honour thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with promise.

COLL. iii. 20.—Children, obey your parents in all things : for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord.

I. TIM. v. 4.—But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents : for it is good and acceptable before God.

THE obligations of children to parents do not arise merely from parents being the means of their existence ; but they are also founded in the affection, the tender care, and the constant endeavour of parents to promote their happiness.

Nature intended that all parents should be kind and good to their offspring ; and there is hardly a species of creatures known to us (mankind excepted) who are not always so. Uniform, faithful *instinct* guides the whole brute creation to take care of their young ; unless in a few instances, where nature has rendered such care unnecessary. Is *reason* less faith-



ful, or less capable of directing mankind to find out and pursue their true felicity?—Surely no. But the voice of reason is not always attended to; man is left at liberty to follow this guide, or not to follow it, and from the abuse of this liberty flows all moral evil.\* The passions grow clamorous, the voice of reason is

\* Among the various attempts which have been made by men of learning and speculation to account for the production of *evil*, under the government of a Being infinitely powerful, wise, and good,—no one seems to me so satisfactory as the attributing it to *the abuse of our freedom*; for this at once acquits our Maker, and we appear to be accountable for our own actions.

There are, indeed, some who assert that we are not free, but that we are under the influence of external objects, which, striking on our senses with irresistible force, determine our actions. This opinion, however, appears to me to be inconsistent with our ideas of infinite perfection: for, can we suppose that, after infinite power, wisdom, and goodness had been exerted in our creation, our actions, on which must depend our happiness or misery, were to be determined by the accidental impulses of external objects?—Surely no.

We may allow, that external objects may operate, in a certain measure, towards the determining of our actions: but, then, God hath given us *reason*, hath implanted in us a principle of intelligence; which, if duly attended to, and properly exerted, will always prove a sufficient balance for the force of external objects. Our being able to deliberate before we act, is one proof that we are free.

Another more singular argument made use of by some, to prove that we are not free, has been, “that God, being *necessarily existent*, all his properties, all his actions, and every thing which proceeds from him, must also *necessarily* be; for, *as the cause is, so will be the effect.*”

Those who make use of this argument have probably not considered that there may be a *necessity* which does not include *choice*; and which, in God, may be styled a *necessity* of perfection, or a *necessity* arising from the perfection of his nature, ever determining his choice of that which is best: but this is a property of the infi-

drowned, the bounds of virtue are broken down, and vice flows in like a torrent. Parents neglect their duty to their children, and, of course, children have fewer obligations to their parents; and hence disorder and mis-rule take place of reason and virtue.

But, though the want of affection in bad parents

nitely perfect God alone, who, though *necessarily* existent, and though his operations may be the necessary effects of his nature or attributes, yet they are attended with *consciousness*, or a knowing and voluntary exertion of them.

Our unhappiness generally arises from our making a wrong choice. This is another, though a melancholy proof of our being *free*. If we were constantly under the immediate guidance and direction of our Maker, we should, doubtless, always act right, and be always happy.

But some may say, “Why did God makes us free, if our unhappiness be the consequence of that freedom?” It is not for frail short-sighted mortals to determine, why God does thus, or thus; yet we may easily aver, that whatever he does is best. However, I will reply to this puzzling query as well as I can; and, though I may not give satisfaction, I hope at least not to give offence.

First, then, it appears to me, that *consciousness* is necessary to constitute that *rational felicity* which God certainly intended that his rational creatures should enjoy. If man be constantly impelled and acted on by God, or if God should force man to be happy, independent of his own choice, (which, by the bye, is perhaps impossible,) though infinite skill might be exerted in the contrivance, and infinite power employed in the execution, he would only be a more perfect *machine*; and *conscious merit* might as well be ascribed to a clock which always went right, as to a man who invariably acted right by the impelling power of a first cause.

Again, it appears to me that every *intelligence* must be *free*, from his having a power to compare objects, and consequently of preferring one to another, and of feeling the agreeable or disagreeable effects of a right or a wrong choice.

But farther,—*freedom* appears to be a necessary adjunct of

must tend to extinguish that warm and ardent reverence, love, and gratitude, which otherwise would fill the minds of children, yet there are duties owing to parents, as our fellow-creatures, which nothing can exempt them from. If parents are even unnatural enough to be our enemies, instead of our best friends,

*intelligence*, or else *intelligence* is a necessary adjunct of *freedom*. In either case, every intelligence must be *free*, and *man* (if I may use the expression) is necessarily a *free being*.

In this view of the case, it would appear as pertinent to ask, Why God made man *intelligent*? as to ask, Why God made man *free*?

I submit this argument to the judgment of the candid enquirer: if it prove conclusive, the whole will stand thus:—

God made man intelligent; endowed him with a power of comparing objects, and consequently of preferring one to another; of deliberating on his actions, and of weighing them in the balance of reason,—in which the very essence of freedom seems to consist. It appears to me impossible that man should be intelligent, conscious, and accountable, without being made free; and it likewise appears, that from the abuse of this freedom sprung moral evil. God certainly intended the happiness of his creature man, taking in the whole of his existence, or he never would have created him: but, from the imperfection of his nature, from his freedom, from his ignorance, from his mistakes, and imprudent choice of objects, he frequently makes himself unhappy. “God made man upright, but he sought out many inventions.” To argue against freedom, seems to be to argue against all our natural feelings, to be defining away our very intelligence, our consciousness, our merit, and all our rational happiness. I never yet could conceive what motive any person could have for endeavouring to propagate the gloomy doctrine of necessity; a doctrine which tends to destroy all that delight and satisfaction which must arise in the human mind from a consciousness of having acted right, and thereby contributed to its own happiness; a doctrine which tends to blunt the edge of reflection, and to take off those uneasy sensations which ever attend a consciousness of having acted wrong, and thereby contributed to our own unhappiness.



yet are we to render them good offices: "If they hunger, feed them; if they thirst, give them drink," &c. This nature and Christ teach us. Revenge should never find place in the human heart, but forgiveness and mercy should reign triumphant there. This is nature's rule relative to mankind in general; and surely our parents should not be put on a worse footing than our enemies, if they should prove enemies: nay, supposing every thing else equal, we ought to give the preference to our parents. I must own that it is extremely difficult to bear bad usage where nature directs us to expect affection and tender regard. But the laws of nature and of Christ make no distinction of this sort. All mankind are entitled to humane treatment from us, independent of their behaviour, but not to our esteem or affection. These will always depend on the actions of others; for it is out of our power to love or hate, but as objects appear amiable or hateful. Children can neither love, honour, nor respect, bad parents: but they ought to relieve their necessities, as fellow-creatures.

The laws of nature can never be superseded by any other laws. The passion of love is not the proper object of a command, because it is involuntary. An amiable object will strike on the mind, or on the senses, with irresistible force, and constrain our affection, unless our moral sense be depraved; and so of the contrary. This is one of nature's laws, and no command can operate in opposition to it.

Children cannot possibly have for bad parents, even though it were commanded under the penalty of death itself, that warm, that ardent love and esteem,



which they cannot fail to have for good ones: so unalterable, so uniform, and so wisely constituted, are the laws of nature. Even the honouring of bad parents seems impossible to be complied with, if the heart hath any thing to do in the affair. The command of Moses can reach no farther than mere external respect; and this he doubtless thought very difficult, since he annexes a reward to the performance of it. He must certainly mean bad parents; because a command to honour good parents, and to fix a reward for so doing, must be absolutely unnecessary,—as it always is to command any thing which nature strongly inculcates.

A child will love and honour a friend more than he can a bad parent.

The duties of children to good parents are very extensive. The law of gratitude, as well as the law of love, requires the punctual performance of them. God requires it, and he will reward it.

Children are obliged to do all in their power to promote the happiness of good parents; and not to do any thing that is, at any time, likely to make them uneasy. Children should readily and cheerfully obey the commands of good parents, because good parents will command nothing but what appears to them to be consistent with the honour, virtue; and happiness of their children.

Good children will sacrifice all, but virtue and honour, to procure the happiness of good parents. Thus, a mutual exchange and intercourse of good offices will pass between them; and by this means such a family will be happy, so far as relates to themselves.

All good children would think the tie of gratitude too great, and too closely knit, ever to be loosened, did they but know all the anxious cares, fears, and inquietudes, which tender parents felt for them in their infant state.

Upon the whole, I would recommend to children to consider that they may one day be parents ; and to parents, to remember that they once were children. By this means, they will both be ready to make favourable allowances for the faults and foibles of each other.

## Chap. XVII.

### OF EQUITY.

MATT. vii. 12.—Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them : for this is the law and the prophets.\*

THESE words of Christ contain the most comprehensive rule of equity, of any we find in the New Testament : nay, all the social duties seem to be summed up and comprised in this single text. Christ himself says, “ For this is the law and the prophets ;” as if he had said, these words contain all that the moral law, or law of nature, requires, and all that the prophets taught relative to the social duties. The true and genuine spirit of morality is conspicuous in these words.

The practice of the duties which we owe to one

\* Vide the 24th *Moral of Confucius*, in No. I. of the PHILOSOPHICAL LIBRARY. This great moral philosopher flourished in China about 550 years before the Christian era.—EDITOR.

another is very strongly connected with our duty to God; nay, it is a part of that duty to make our fellow-creatures happy: happiness to all, upon the final result of things, being the plan and design of infinite wisdom.

The excellent rule above-mentioned contains that perfect standard of our duty to one another, which teaches us not only what we should do, but also what we should avoid. It determines exactly what kind of treatment nature prohibits with respect to the rest of mankind, as well as what it allows and requires of each individual, in his social capacity. It not only forbids every thing that is unjust, hard, severe, or cruel, but also all the lesser ills which we may inflict upon each other. Who, that observes this rule, will treat another with aught but friendship, humanity, condescension, respect, politeness, tenderness, goodness, charity, beneficence, and the like? for such treatment we all wish to receive from others. When, by such behaviour as this, we diffuse happiness around us, we are following the dictates of nature, and fulfilling this most excellent law of God. When our feeling hearts expand, and take in the claims of our fellow-mortals; when we comfort and relieve them in their troubles; when we are just, charitable, and benevolent to all; we are then *doing by others as we would they should do by us*.

This rule is so excellent in its kind, so extensive in its nature, and of such universal use, that the steady and uniform practice of it would well nigh shut all *moral* evil out of the world, and banish a great deal of *natural* evil.



Who can be at a loss about the practice of their duty to their fellow-creatures, since this law is written in their hearts, and, if duly attended to, will happily direct their lives? Would you know how far your good offices to mankind should extend? let this law be your guide.

All the laws of God are calculated to promote the happiness of his creatures; and all human laws should have the same object. All human laws relative to religion or the worship of God, if they are founded in reason and nature, will tend to promote peace, harmony, and good-will, among mankind: otherwise God cannot approve of them, nor can they be thus founded, or be of divine origin; for the laws of *nature* and *reason* are the laws of God.

However men may have been mistaken in this point, the most acceptable service we can offer to God is the making ourselves and others happy. But we never can please or honour God by any religious ceremony, or by assenting to any dark, mysterious, or ambiguous tenet, that has a tendency to lessen the happiness of any one person. Nothing that hurts ourselves or others can be pleasing or acceptable to God.

If mankind had always followed *nature* and *reason* in fixing their ideas of God, and of his will with regard to our social and moral practices, they never would have conceived that a Being of infinite mercy and compassion, who made his creatures in order to render them happy, could be pleased with any thing cruel or unnatural,—such as *human sacrifices*, *severe penances*, *pains*, *barbarities*, and the like bodily



punishments. Reason teaches us that God is always propitious to his creatures, and that he cannot be rendered more so by the sacrifice of any innocent creature whatever. The blood of bulls or of goats, or of any other creatures, cannot make a sinner less a sinner. Nothing less than a change of sentiments and affections, from vice to virtue and purity, can render us objects of complacency to a God of infinite purity and uprightness. The law of nature, as well as that of the New Testament, directs and prescribes that the worship of God should be pure and spiritual, God himself being a pure and perfect spirit; that it should be the worship of the heart, founded in a just sense of the infinite perfections of God, of our constant dependance on him, and on our warmest gratitude for the favours we receive at his hands.

By laws relative to religion, I mean those laws which are intended to regulate the mode, or external form, of divine worship. These may be absolutely indifferent, and can be no essential parts, if they are any parts, of religion, or of pure and spiritual worship. Pure and spiritual worship will not admit of prescribed forms and ceremonies, since it may be performed at any time, or in any place; as it consists alone in the purity of the heart, in the sincerity of the intention, and in the adoration of the soul. A heart filled with just sentiments of the Deity will pursue its own opinions and modes of worship, without being offended at the opinions and forms of others. A good heart will be constantly and uniformly in proper frame and disposition for the worship of God.

Every man's opinion as to the mode of worshipping

God must be right, provided he be sincere, and his heart pure. He cannot err, whose life is innocent, who indulges others in their religious opinions without molestation, and who has charity for all good men.

As nature has not provided any fixed rule or mode of worship, mankind are evidently allowed to differ in their opinions about it, and each man hath a natural right to pursue his own.

If my religious opinions are such as my reason dictates; if I am conscious that I am sincere; if my worship of God is pure and spiritual, not calculated to raise the admiration of mankind, or mixed with worldly views; if I am possessed of an awful sense of the majesty of the supreme Lord and Sovereign of the universe, and of the infinite distance between God and me, and am therefore humble in my own mind; if I am just, charitable, humane, and benevolent, to my fellow-creatures,—can it be material what mode of worship I profess, or by what religious appellation I am distinguished? In this case, who can justly be offended with me, or punish me for my religious opinions?—I hope to be excused for thus departing from my text, as this digression is intended to prove, illustrate, and convince men, how very unnatural, and how much a breach of Christ's most excellent rule, which I am now speaking of, it is to persecute, or any way ill-treat, our fellow-creatures on account of difference of opinion or of modes in religious matters. God is the only judge in matters of conscience; and those who do not like my modes and opinions may abstain from them. He only can

search the heart, and he only can judge of its sincerity. Now truth and sincerity are the very essence of the religion of nature.—Why should we be angry with one another? Why should anathemas resound from the pulpit against persons of different opinions, who probably are as good and virtuous, and as much the objects of divine favour, as those who censure and condemn them? This is a flagrant breach of the above-mentioned excellent law.

We all love liberty of every kind: but liberty of conscience seems to be a birth-right privilege, of a kind which no power hath a right to deprive us. If a man be wicked, can it be material what his opinions of modes and ceremonies are? Can they purify one evil action, or rectify one corrupt affection? The wicked man's actions will condemn him under any form of religion. On the other hand, if a man be good and virtuous, can it signify what religion he professes, provided it be not contrary in its mode to our social and civil ideas of decency? His goodness and his virtue will be rewarded by God, though his opinions differ ever so widely from the established forms of his country. The grand enquiry, if any is made, should be about a man's *moral character*. Is he just, charitable, and benevolent, in the general course of his life? Does he practise the virtues of morality, and strive to diffuse happiness through the world? If he does, his principles cannot be bad; for "the tree is known by its fruit," and bad principles will not produce good actions.

Nature never intended that we should all think alike as to religious forms and ceremonies: if she

had, some fixed rule would have been prescribed to us,—some rule which the light of nature would have been capable of discovering universally. But it is evident nature did intend that we should *be patient, charitable, humane, and forgiving*, and that *we should do to others as we would they should do unto us*. After all, it is amazing that those, whose business it is to teach the rule to others, and to enforce the practice of it both by precept and example, should so far neglect it themselves as to persecute and cruelly use their brethren on account of their religious opinions. This is adopting the worst and greatest error of the church of Rome. Some of its fooleries may be retained without much mischief, unless persons pay so great a regard to them as to neglect things of importance: but that they should copy out the worst part of the worst religion is indeed surprising, especially as they have protested against her pernicious tenets, and have separated themselves from communion with her.

Liberty of conscience hath been the darling theme of some of the greatest writers of this and the last age. To repeat their arguments against persecution will be more to the purpose than any thing I can say of my own.

I would, therefore, in a particular manner, recommend the great Mr. Locke's Treatise on Toleration; and a piece lately published by that celebrated writer, Dr. Warburton, the present Bishop of Gloucester, entitled "The Doctrine of Grace," &c. from which last piece I shall transcribe some few passages relative to this subject.



In page 199, the bishop says, "If any good use can be made of what hath been already said, it will be chiefly promoted by these reverend men, who, in honour of the church which they serve, and in gratitude to the state by which they are protected, will make it their first care to support that most just of all public laws, the law of TOLERATION, which, how long soever obstructed in its passage to us, and how late soever arrived amongst us, is certainly of DIVINE ORIGINAL." Here the good bishop asserts, that the law of toleration (like the law of nature) is of divine original. Again he says, page 205, "But, then, if we shew ourselves thus rightly disposed in favour of this DIVINE *principle of toleration*:" and in page 213, "For with religious errors, as such, the state hath nothing to do; nor any right to attempt to repel or suppress them. They are the *civil mischiefs* with which civil society is concerned, the mischiefs arising from *religious quarrels*."\*

Religious quarrels may produce mischief: but, if

\* Religious quarrels which produce mischief generally arise from persecution; but *toleration* of opinions will certainly tend to prevent religious quarrels, and all the mischief which may arise therefrom. We never find any mischief arise from religious quarrels, unless it be where the civil magistrate interferes to punish such errors in opinion as the church points out to it, and supposes may produce mischief, if tolerated. When the church influences the civil power to punish errors in opinion, it is to prevent the mischiefs which may arise from the toleration of such opinions. The church, with a watchful eye, guards against every thing that may tend to weaken its authority; yet, in such a state as ours is, where the true spirit of liberty prevails and flourishes, the church finds its greatest security in the "*DIVINE principle of toleration*." This is a sufficient reason for recommending it, if this learned bishop had no other.

people are suffered peaceably to enjoy their own opinions, there will be no quarrelling, and of course no mischief. The bishop goes on,—“ But of this separation, whether with or without cause, there is no adequate judge but that Power who can distinguish between a well and an ill-informed conscience.” I shall add one observation more of this rational bishop’s, in favour of toleration, and against persecution, which I wish was written in letters of gold, and placed in the most conspicuous part of every church in England. Page 201, he says, “ In a word, the church in which religious liberty is cordially entertained and zealously supported, may be truly called CHRISTIAN: for, if the mark of the beast be PERSECUTION, as the sacred volumes decypher to us, well may we put TOLERATION as the seal of the living God. This, then, is our present boast.”\*

Thus hath this rational bishop directed the clergy how to act in this important affair, and given his opinion that human laws reach not the consciences of men. Would to God! that all those in power, both in church and state, would ever remember that God has reserved to himself the knowledge and judgment of the human heart, and that he cannot be pleased with having his authority usurped. One would think that the judges of the earth should tremble when they pronounce sentence on their brethren, in things of which *God alone can judge*. How irrational and unchristian is it for the rulers of our church to influence and add weight to the arm of

\* All the quotations from Bishop Warburton’s “ Doctrine of Grace” are taken from the octavo edition of that work.

civil power in the invasion of the rights of conscience, instead of following the example of Christ and his apostles! How absurd, that they should copy from the Inquisition, and substitute corporal punishments in the room of reason and instruction! This is not acting like rational beings, but like beasts, who, having no arguments to support their cause, recur to force.

Conscience is a steady friend to truth, or at least to what appears to be true. No bodily punishments can alter or lessen this attachment. Reason may convince a man of his error, but the punishment of his body hath no such tendency.

Persecution is the bane of truth and sincerity: it never informs or convinces the judgment, but will always tend to establish hypocrisy, ignorance, and superstition; and therefore is absurd, uncharitable, and diabolical.\*

After all, if the most excellent precept of nature and of Christ, which is the subject of this article, will not prevent persecution, surely nothing can.

Tell me, you who persecute and ill-treat such as differ from you in religious opinions;—tell me, whether this rule be written in your hearts? and, farther, tell me, whether that can be a good religion which tolerates persecution?—Surely there cannot be a stronger mark of a bad one.

If you apprehend a man's opinion to be erroneous,

\* The good Catholic Bishop of Cambray observes, that liberty of thinking and expressing our opinions is an impregnable fortress which cannot be overcome; and that force may make hypocrites, but can never make proselytes.



you are taught by your great Master to *restore him in the spirit of meekness*,—by reason and argument, and not by punishment: the one may *cure*, the other *confirm*, his errors.

The friends of virtue and true religion can never be the friends of persecution: it always injures and weakens the cause of virtue, and establishes hypocrisy and superstition on the ruins of true religion.

Reason obliges us to conform to the laws of virtue: now the laws of virtue are conformable to the divine will. Nature and reason, as well as Christianity, teach us that it is the immutable will of God that his creatures should be happy. Where, then, can an excuse for persecution be found? Not in reason, not in nature, not in Christianity,—or at least in that which I conceive to be pure and unadulterated Christianity. It is directly opposite to the will of God, and therefore is diabolical; having, as Dr. Warburton says, “the mark of the beast.”

But let us farther consider the divine precept, *of doing to others as we would they should do unto us*, and see how excellently well calculated it is to regulate all the actions of our lives in general, so far as they relate to our fellow-creatures. Before we enter upon any action, wherein the welfare of our neighbour is concerned, let us ask ourselves this question—“Is this such usage and treatment as I should like to receive myself in the same circumstances?” Afterwards, always deliberate long enough calmly to answer it. Give this most excellent precept time to operate, and it will effectually restrain us from doing any act that would injure our neighbour in his person,



his property, or his peace. God hath most certainly implanted this rule in our hearts, and it is our own fault if we do not cultivate and improve its growth. The soil must be very bad in which this divine principle will not take root and flourish: but it is often either obstinately rooted up, or those rank weeds, the irregular appetites and passions, grow up and choke it in its infancy, before it comes to perfection.

As I said above, it is our own fault if this divine principle does not grow up to such a degree of perfection as to promote universal happiness. Instead of rooting it up, and planting self-interest, hatred, malice, cruelty, and revenge, in its room; let us beg of God to “water it with the dew of his blessing,” that so its fruit may be charity, which is the bond of perfection.

The precepts of pure Christianity, like those of nature, are all mildness and benevolence; and those especially, whose business it is to teach these precepts to others, ought to shew, by their practice, that virtue is easily attainable.

They who know the just value of virtue, and the peace and happiness which await her steps, will not quit her, though in the lowest estate, for the mitre or the diadem. The portion which she brings consists not in wealth, honours, and temporal dominions; but in that which is infinitely preferable,—peace of mind, the approbation of good men, the consciousness of having acted right, and the expectation of being rewarded with everlasting happiness. Though the great and mighty ones of the world may despise and neglect her; though she be often without a portion in

this life, yet she hath an inheritance in reversion, infinitely superior to all the riches and honours this world can afford. Her treasure is such “as moth and rust cannot corrupt,” and it is placed “where thieves cannot break through and steal.” When the pleasures of the world shall pass away like the morning cloud and early dew, the lovers of virtue will have rivers of pleasure which are inexhaustible, and crowns of glory that will never fade.

Let not any of the discouragements or disadvantages you meet with in this world induce you to relinquish virtue, but march boldly under her standard, without regarding the danger that may attend it; always remembering that, though her ranks are thin, and her numbers few, compared with those who oppose her, yet the cause of virtue is the cause of God; and, “if God be for us, who can be against us,” with any prospect of success? Upon the whole, whatever be the consequence here, let us stedfastly and uniformly perform the duties of our stations; and contribute to the happiness of the world by the practice of this most excellent precept, *of doing to others what we would they should do unto us in the same circumstances.*

This divine rule is so plain, that no one can mistake it; so clear, that every one may understand it. It contains no mystery: it is confined to no particular time or place: it suits *high* and *low*, *rich* and *poor*, *learned* and *unlearned*: it is natural, and it is universal. There needs no art or address to teach the propriety of it; but, as soon as ever we are able to discern that we are brethren, children of one almighty,

good, and merciful Parent, we may likewise discern the propriety of this rule, and its tendency to promote universal happiness.

Let the great and mighty ones of this world remember that this maxim of doing as you would be done by, is a precept of that Being who is infinitely above them,—infinitely more above them than they are above the meanest of their vassals ; and that it is their duty, and their interest, to treat their inferiors as they would wish to be treated themselves in the same circumstances. Let them farther remember that nothing will check the growth of this principle in the human heart so much as pride. This rank weed is the bane of benevolence, and they will not grow up together.

I have already given an article on Pride : but it appears to be of so much consequence to check its growth, that I hope to be excused if I consider it farther here.

The soil in which benevolence delights is virtue. The heart in which it will take deep root and flourish must be (according to St. James) “ pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits : without partiality, without hypocrisy, and (I may add) without pride.” On the contrary, it never will grow in an impure, violent, ungentle, hard, cruel, malicious, revengeful, or proud, heart.

By the general behaviour of the great, and of those who possess the high places of the world, one would imagine they thought that the poor and lower part of mankind had no right to the same kind of treatment as themselves ; and that this most excellent rule, *of*



*doing as you would be done by*, should operate and be regarded only between persons of the same rank and condition. The rich and great can hardly, for a moment, even in thought, change places with the poor and distressed; which is necessary to be done, in order to practise this heaven-born precept.

Pride, which is too often the concomitant of riches and grandeur, must first be rooted out of the heart before benevolence will find room to expand itself, and grow up to any degree of perfection.

With what detestation and abhorrence must the infinitely-perfect God look down on the pride of man, who, perhaps, is the very lowest of all the orders of intelligent beings which he has created! This is a humiliating thought: but the proud man will not indulge such contemplations. God is but seldom in the proud man's thoughts: he does not choose to recognise a Being so infinitely above him. Such thoughts would tend to make him humble; and humility cannot grow where pride spreads its towering branches, and sheds its baneful influence. The hard and unnatural soil in which pride luxuriates will by no means suit any of the Christian virtues, or permit them to flourish under its shade. Pride is generally a tall spreading tree, that not only shades, but destroys, the virtues of benevolence, kindness, charity, compassion, and the like.

One might fill a volume with shewing the beauty and propriety of the heavenly precept which is the subject of this chapter, and with proving its natural tendency to promote universal happiness: but I doubt I should be thought tedious if I expatiated farther



thereon ; and shall therefore only add, in general, that there is not a crime, of which men can be guilty against each other, but may be prevented by a serious and timely application of this rule.

If we love our neighbours and ourselves, which God and nature require that we should do ; if we would contribute to the extirpation of vice, and to the increase of moral virtue and happiness : “ *All things whatsoever we would that men should do unto us, we should do even so unto them : for this is the law and the prophets.*” Matt. vii. 12.

## BOOK IV.

CONTAINING

SUNDRY GENERAL ARTICLES.

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I HAVE now finished each article of my proposed plan, agreeably to the division of my subject. Under the various preceding heads, I have likewise introduced all the morality of the New Testament which properly belongs to them; and have endeavoured to shew the harmony that subsists between the genuine religion and morality of Christ, and the religion of reason and nature. But, as I would willingly take in the whole of those moral doctrines and precepts of Christ which we have in his Gospel, and shew them in that point of light which will most probably induce their practice, I have read with attention those parts of the New Testament which are not noticed under the heads before-mentioned; and I find therein many other duties inculcated, which are of a more general turn, and of which the practice will tend to promote general happiness.

It is, indeed, very difficult to separate the duties which we owe to ourselves from those which we owe to each other. Self-love and social are so much the same,—our own happiness and that of others are so intimately connected,—that whatever we do to pro-

mote the happiness of others will, in general, add to our own, unless our tempers are very unbenevolent indeed ; and then we should hardly do any thing to make others happy. From hence it follows that pleasures are reflected back on ourselves from acts of benevolence to others. Nay, so strongly has nature impressed on the human mind the idea of happiness, as arising from benevolence, and so constantly has experience confirmed it, that we hardly suppose any being can communicate good to other beings without adding thereby to his own happiness. This idea is so natural, that I think we may venture to suppose that even God himself receives pleasure from the happiness of his creatures, and that

“ From bliss devolv'd, bliss infinite rebounds.”

God existed always ; consequently he created always :\* from whence it follows, that his infinite benevolence, communicated from eternity, reverberated back infinite bliss from eternity. His happiness is the consequence of his perfection, and the infinite, eternal, necessary effect of his benevolence. It is the very reverse of defect. Surely the happiness of an infinite system of all possible intelligencies must be one source of infinite delight and felicity in the divine mind, which, as I conceive, sees and feels it all, and consequently enjoys it all. Can we think God a Being that does not delight in the happiness of his creatures ? Surely no. I conceive that he enjoys ineffable pleasure and delight from the contemplation

\* See article Love of God.

of the happiness arising from his infinite goodness communicated to an infinite system of innumerable intelligencies. Upon the whole, I cannot conceive an infinitely intelligent and good Being, without considering him as receiving infinite delight and felicity from the infinite and eternal communication of bliss to an infinite creation of perceptive beings, or all possible existencies. Without this, we establish infinite felicity without a base, and rest it on nothing. But the supposing that the felicity of God arises from the infinite and eternal exertion of his attributes and perfections, seems to me to give a more exalted idea of him than the averring that he can possess those perfections, and yet be ineffably and infinitely happy without exerting them. This also appears to me a contradiction, because it supposes infinite goodness without any proof thereof, or display of its effects: that is, it supposes infinite goodness, without any goodness at all,—which is a contradiction; or, in other words, it is supposing that God could be happy without being good,—which is inconsistent with the perfection implied in self-existence from all eternity.

From what hath been said, it seems clearly to appear, that our own happiness, the happiness of our fellow-creatures, nay, the infinite felicity of the ever-blessed God, have benevolence for their source.

The duties which we owe to God, to our fellow-creatures, and to ourselves, appear likewise to be so intimately connected, that they can never be separated: and it also appears that it is not only our duty, but our greatest interest, to make happiness as diffusive and universal as we can.



This, and this only, will be acting our parts well ; and for so doing we shall certainly have the approbation of the Lord and Governor of the universe.

I shall now proceed to consider those other natural duties of which I have not yet spoken, and to include in them all the moral doctrines of the New Testament.

The first article which I shall consider is happiness, or what the Scripture calls blessedness. Under this head I shall endeavour to shew in what true happiness consists ; first, from the doctrines of the New Testament ; and, in the next place, I shall prove that those doctrines are founded in reason and nature.—Such will be the method observed throughout the rest of this work.

## Chap. I.

### OF HAPPINESS.

**MATT. v.** from the 3d to the 10th verse.—Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.

**JOHN, xiii. 17.**—If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

**ROMANS, iv. 8.**—Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

**JAMES, i. 12.**—Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

**REVEL. xiv. 13.**—Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord, that they may rest from their labour, and their works do follow them.

**HERE** we see that Christ, in his most excellent sermon on the mount, tells us, that the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peace-maker, those who earnestly seek after righteousness, and those who mourn for their sins, are all objects of the divine favour, and will be happy, either in this world, or in some future state of existence. How well do the doctrines of Christ agree with those which nature teaches!

The practice of the duties here enumerated is the way, pointed out by nature, to true happiness. Several of these duties having already been considered under their respective heads, and proved to be perfectly consistent with reason and nature, I shall not enlarge on them here; but only remark, that true happiness will always consist in the discharge of the duties which we owe to God, to ourselves, and to our fellow-creatures; and that a sincere sorrow for our

sins, succeeded by amendment, will always procure our pardon, and reinstate us in the favour of God: for surely God cannot make a reformed and truly penitent sinner miserable, without being himself unbenevolent and unjust.

As God made us to render us happy, it will be our own faults if we are not so. If we regulate our desires by reason, and perform the duties which the laws of nature and of Christ prescribe, these desires will be satisfied: now, to desire only what is rational, to desire it intensely, and to have such desire satisfied, is the highest idea that we can conceive of happiness.

St. John says, "that the knowledge and practice of our duty will make us happy;" and St. James, "that the overcoming all temptation to the breach of our duty will be rewarded." Again, in the Revelations, we are told that those are happy who have performed good works; for that, when they die, their works will follow them. Are not these promises very strong incitements to good actions? Happiness is the prize: and can there be one more worthy of our best endeavours and most assiduous efforts? Besides, we are to consider that it is not only the happiness of this life, but also that of a future state, which depends on the performance of our duty. How good is God to us, to give us happiness on such easy terms! We are required only to act like rational creatures, and to perform those duties with which health of body and peace of mind are intimately connected. "The ways of virtue are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peaceable and happy."

## Chap. II.

### OF GOOD WORKS.

**ACTS, x. 34, 35.**—Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but, in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, shall be accepted with him.

**MATT. v. 16.**—Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

**II. COR. ix. 8.**—And God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

**II. TIM. iii. 17.**—That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

**HEB. xiii. 16, 21.**—But to do good and communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Make you perfect to every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight.

**JAMES, ii. 17.**—Even so *faith*, if it hath not *works*, is dead, being alone.

**PHILIPP. iv. 8.**—Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.

**I. PETER, iii. 8, 9.**—Finally, brethren, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another: love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise, blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

**II. PETER, i. 5, 6, 7.**—And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.

**THUS** doth the New Testament fully and strongly recommend good works, or the doing of those things which have the most direct tendency to promote universal happiness. No one can deny that nature also teaches this precept. The contributing all that is in our power to promote general happiness, is a duty which we owe to God, as well as to ourselves and to our fellow-creatures. This hath been shewn under various articles in this work. We are, then, under every kind of obligation to perform this duty. Both



nature, reason, and Christianity, teach us this, and proclaim to us that it corresponds exactly with the intentions of the kind Parent of the universe, who, as an indulgent father, requires nothing of us but piety towards him, in order to keep up a sense of our various obligations, and justice, charity, and benevolence, towards one another. What an infinitely-beneficent Governor must he be, who demands of his creatures nothing but what best contributes to their own happiness. He requires nothing difficult to be performed ; and surely nothing difficult, much less *impossible*, to be *understood*. To demand this last would be to mock his creatures, and would be inconsistent with all our ideas of infinite perfection. Therefore, wherever we find a command to do things out of our power, either in belief or practice, we may rest assured that it is a *command of man*, arising from ignorance, pride, or interest ; and that it should always be considered as distinct from the commands of God, which we find in *nature*, and which we may collect from the moral parts of the New Testament.

I have, I believe, observed more than once in these pages, that true faith is a belief of the being of God, and a dependance on him for happiness, if we act agreeably to his will. Now this faith, or belief, is the best foundation for right action : and it is plain that St. Peter looked upon it as merely a foundation to build good works upon ; and that, without good works, it would be barren and unfruitful. Therefore it is that he desires us to give all diligence ; that is, by no means to neglect the adding to our faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly

kindness, and charity. These form the beautiful superstructure, and will carry us up to God. By doing this, we shall most certainly answer the end of our creation, be happy ourselves, contribute to the happiness of others, and be the objects of the favour of God, both here and through an eternal hereafter.

### Chap. III.

#### OF REPENTANCE.

MATT. iv. 17.—From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

LUKE, xiii. 3.—I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

LUKE, xxiv. 47.—And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

ACTS, iii. 19.—Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.

ACTS, xvii. 30.—And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.

ACTS, xxvi. 20.—That they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

II. PETER, iii. 9.—Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

By the above quotations from the New Testament, we may see of how great importance Christ and his apostles thought the doctrine of repentance. According to them, without repentance and amendment we cannot be the proper objects of forgiving mercy and of future happiness. Amendment is a proof of the sincerity of our repentance; and forgiveness will be the consequence of this, at least with regard to God. Now some divines have insinuated that this important duty was not taught by the *light of nature*, but that it was peculiar to the *Gospel institution*. I

wonder that any should be of this opinion: for, if the practice of this duty be so necessary to our happiness as it appears to be in the New Testament, can it be supposed that God should never require it, or give mankind any information about it, till the coming of Christ; and that he should permit millions and millions of the human race to pass from this world into another state of existence, without any knowledge of this important duty?

If the duties of repentance and amendment were at any time made the terms of forgiveness, why not at all times?

But, that the duty of repentance may not be void of that force which every duty requires when proved to be natural, and of eternal obligation, I shall endeavour to prove it to be a natural duty, from our natural feelings. How very few are there who can injure their fellow-creatures without feeling some compunction, and a desire to be forgiven? Those who do not, must be insensible to all the tender feelings of humanity; and for such I do not write: for hearts thus hardened against the dictates of nature and conscience will not be penetrated by any human institution,—no, not even by the Gospel of Christ; and much less by any thing that I can say. But thus much, I think, we may fairly conclude,—that, as human nature must be always the same, mankind must have had the same natural feelings before the coming of Christ as they have now. This duty of repentance, this desire of forgiveness, must have been originally implanted in the human heart by God himself, who never left his intelligent creatures



without evidence of his infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, or without a knowledge of their duty to him and to one another.

It has been objected by some, that, though repentance and forgiveness may be natural between man and man, and at all times practised, yet how can we be assured that God, "whose ways are not as our ways," will forgive on the same terms?—To this I reply, that, if truth and reason be not the same in God as they are in his intelligent creatures, how can they know any thing of him aright? If that which appears true to us, on a due use of our reasoning faculty, may be false with God; and that be reasonable to us and fit to be done, which to him may be unreasonable and unfit to be done; how can God require our assent to his laws, or how can we distinguish between his laws and the tricks and juggles of designing men? All that we know of the moral character of God, is from what we read in our hearts: all the moral attributes which we ascribe to him, arise from what we esteem the perfections of our own nature; and we suppose that God possesses them in an infinite degree. If this be the case, then, can we suppose that God would implant in the human mind the knowledge of a duty, and require the practice of it between man and man; and that the same duty practised towards him should not have the same good consequences? Shall forgiveness be naturally expected between man and man, on a sincere repentance; and shall it not be expected from that benevolent Being, "whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive?" It is unnatural and horrid to suppose the contrary.



The same disposition of mind which would incline us to repent of an injury done to our brother, would also incline us, in a sincere and humble manner, to beg forgiveness of God for the breach of any of his laws. Both must be taught by the *light of nature*; and both were practised, till the *priests* corrupted and darkened the minds of the people, by representing God as a being that was to be placated and rendered kind to his creatures by sacrifices, fastings, penances, mortifications, and bodily pains. The simple and natural ideas of repentance and amendment, which are the terms of forgiveness, gave place to most horrid cruelties. The love of God was soon banished from the world, and superstitious fear and dread succeeded.\*

The doctrines of repentance and forgiveness are certainly moral doctrines, founded in the law of nature, and would have been of eternal obligation, though Christ had never appeared in the world. These, as well as all his other doctrines and precepts, were re-publications of *natural religion*: and what can do the religion of Christ more honour than to suppose it thus founded? Can any religion have a better foundation? Is there any other basis that can so well support, unshaken, its superstructure? A religion, thus founded, hath the eternal wisdom, power, and goodness, of God for its support: nor can *bigotry, superstition, enthusiasm, priestcraft, or the gates of hell, prevail against it.*

\* And what dread or craft once began, devotion soon made sacred, and religion immutable.—LOCKE's *Reasonableness of Christianity*.

Such was the pure, genuine, and uncorrupted religion of Christ: all the duties required in it were moral, natural, rational, and of eternal obligation, arising out of the relations we stand in to God and to one another; which relations, being invariable and eternally the same, must, with the duties resulting from them, all be comprehended in the law of nature,—be discoverable by its light,—and be immutable so long as God remains the Father of the universe, and we his intelligent offspring. Consequently, whatever religion makes necessary to salvation the belief and practice of any thing which is not founded in nature and the invariable relations above mentioned, must be *false* and *erroneous*, having only for its sanction the commands of weak and fallible men: so that, how much soever it may be enforced by human power, it can never be binding upon, or properly affect, the heart; for what is not in its own nature fit to be done, there never can be any good reason for commanding.

Repentance and forgiveness are binding upon all mankind, of every sect and denomination whatsoever: every eye must see, every heart must feel, the propriety of these duties, and their tendency to promote universal happiness.

Surely no man can be happy who is conscious of unrepented crimes. It is then our interest, as well as our duty, to set early about the business of repentance; to which there is another motive, viz.—that, the sooner we set about it, the easier it will be to us. The neglect of this duty will naturally harden the heart, and make it a very difficult task. Farther, let

us remember that, though forgiveness with God, and in general with man too, will be a consequence of sincere repentance, yet that repentance is a consequence of some crime. But the most sincere penitent cannot be so proper an object of the divine favour as a person who needs no repentance, notwithstanding what is said of the great joy in heaven over one penitent sinner.

I might bring many great authorities to prove that repentance is a natural duty, and not peculiar to the Christian institution:\* but I shall quote only Mr. Locke, who says, “ God had, by the light of reason, revealed to all mankind, who would make use of that light, that he was good and merciful. The same spark of the divine nature and knowledge in man, which, making him a man, shewed him the law he was under as a man, shewed him also the way of atoning the merciful, kind, compassionate Author and Father of him and his being, when he had transgressed that law. He that made use of this candle of the Lord, so far as to find what was his duty, could not miss also the way to reconciliation and forgiveness, when he had failed of his duty.—The law is the eternal, immutable standard of right; and a part of that law is, that a man should forgive, not only his children, but his enemies, upon their repentance, asking pardon, and amendment; and, therefore, he could not doubt that the author of this law, and God of patience and consolation, who is rich in mercy, would forgive his frail offspring, if they acknow-

\* Pythagoras, and many other Pagan philosophers, taught the duty of repentance.



ledged their faults, disapproved the iniquity of their transgressions, begged his pardon, and resolved in earnest for the future to conform their actions to this rule, which they owned to be just and right. This way of reconciliation, this hope of atonement, the *light of nature* revealed to them."

## Chap. IV.

### OF RELIGION.

JAMES, i. 27.—*Pure religion* and undefiled before God the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

It is thought by many that religion comprehends no more than our notions and worship of God ; and that our duties to ourselves and fellow-creatures are only bare morality. Indeed, if we did not love morality for its own sake, yet adhered to it, as a command from God only, then the practice of it becomes *religion*. However, I shall at present take St. James's word, and consider it agreeably to the above text, which gives us an excellent portrait of true religion, drawn, no doubt, from its bright original—the *religion of reason and nature* ; that religion which requires an exertion of our abilities in communicating happiness to our fellow-creatures,—a religion of actions, and not of words and ceremonies. This is a religion of the heart and the life : therefore, the heart must feel the most exquisite pleasure from the practice of it, and the life be adorned and refined by it ; unless the heart be obdurate, and insensible to the



tender feelings of humanity. The lighting up the countenances of the widow and fatherless, the relieving the distressed and cheering up their depressed spirits, carry with them a degree of virtue and happiness, which assimilates us in some measure to God himself. Such conduct St. James calls pure religion; and it certainly is the purer for being unmixed with forms and ceremonies, or with mysterious and unintelligible propositions and doctrines.

This religion is clearly and easily to be understood by persons of the most moderate capacities: no one needs apply to his *priest* to be instructed in it; nor will it admit of disputes and differences, much less of cruel and bloody persecutions. This religion is, that wisdom which cometh down from above, the offspring of that benevolent Being, “who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works.”

*Mystery*, the support of priestcraft and persecution, hath no place in this pure and undefiled religion; the very essence of which is charity and universal benevolence. *Belief* or *disbelief*, *forms* and *modes of worship*, which have so long divided the world, and been the bane of its peace, are here excluded.

A heart disposed for charity and benevolence can never be disposed for persecution; and, if St. James had been believed and attended to by Christians of every sect, and the dictates of reason and nature had been followed by mankind in general, the lives of thousands would have been spared, who have fallen a sacrifice to an intemperate bloody zeal, founded on ignorance, supported by priestcraft, and continued and cherished for interest.

The keeping ourselves unspotted from the world, or the keeping all irregular passions and appetites in a due subordination to reason, finishes this amiable picture of true religion. Every vice we commit, and every omission of doing good, are so many spots and blemishes in our characters, and tend to cut us off from being members of that *pure, genuine, and undefiled religion*, above described by St. James.

## Chap. V.

### OF JUDGMENT AND REPROOF.

MATT. vii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.—Judge not, that ye be not judged : For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged ; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull the mote out of thine eye ; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye.

ROM. ii. 1.—Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest : for, wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself ; for thou, that judgest, doest the same things.—Ver. 2.—But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth, against them which commit such things.—Ver. 3.—And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

FROM these passages of the New Testament, as well as from the *law of nature*, we may learn how very improper it is to form rash judgments of others, or to be very forward to censure and reprove them. It is our duty first to look into ourselves, and examine if our behaviour and conduct have been free from faults, especially from those of the same kind which we censure in others. No one can be so unfit to find

fault with another as he who commits the same faults and errors himself: our precepts will certainly fail when our examples run counter to them. For instance, how unseemly, how shocking must it be, to see a *priest* reeling from a tavern in the evening, who the same day has made an excellent discourse in praise of temperance! Can such an one expect that his hearers will, for the future, regard his precepts, when he appears to pay so little regard to them himself? Should such an one reprove another for drunkenness, how justly might it be retorted on him, "Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye, &c. : first shew me, by your example, that you believe temperance to be a duty and a virtue, and I shall probably believe so too: but surely your precept will not be much regarded, while your example contradicts it." The same may be said of every other vice.

Self-examination is a very important duty. Let us look, then, into our own hearts; and, if we find that all is not right there, repent and amend: let us cleanse our hearts from all unrighteousness, and God, "who is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things," will forgive us. On the contrary, if our hearts do not condemn us, then we may confidently and boldly reprove the vices of others. But we should be careful always to use great delicacy in our reproofs. If you would have them be effectual, let them be gentle and delicate, unmixed with severity or the least tincture of pride. I know of nothing more difficult than to reprove properly, and so as not to give offence, but, on the contrary, to reclaim; for, if



the party be offended, your reproof will probably make him rather worse than better. The pride of man is such, that it will hardly bear to give the superiority to another; and a man will, therefore, nicely examine whether the person who reproves him has not faults which bring him at least on a level with himself. For this reason, those only are fit to reprove who are themselves remarkably good, and who can do it with great good temper and delicacy of expression. Besides, great allowances should be made for human frailties, and for our want of power to distinguish the motives and intentions of others; for the intention principally stamps the action good or bad: from whence it follows that we should always judge charitably, and of the favourable side. We should very seldom reprove, and we should never *punish*, in matters of conscience. God alone, whose omniscient eye searches the heart, can with propriety take cognizance of such matters; but *human laws* ought not to have any thing to do with them. Upon the whole, in this, as in almost every thing else, we should observe that most excellent rule, of *doing by others as we would wish that they should do by us*. This will infallibly teach us to judge of the actions of others with candour and charity; and that we should never form rash judgment, or reprove immaturely or harshly.



## Chap. VI.

## OF HOPE.

ROM. viii. 24.—For we are saved by hope.

ROM. xii. 12.—Rejoicing in hope.

ROM. xv. 13.—Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope.

I. COR. xv. 19.—If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable.

II. COR. iv. 8.—We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair.

I. PETER, i. 13.—Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end.

GAL. vi. 9.—And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

HOPE is the anchor of the soul, without which we are liable to be driven on the rocks and quicksands of despair.

When, by a strong current of misfortunes, our feeble bark recedes from its course, and is driving before the wind of adversity, then we should throw out the anchor Hope, which will not fail us, provided reason takes the helm, and we are vigilant and active, begging with earnestness the assistance of Heaven, and be not weary in well doing. Hope to the end; for, while you hope, you will endeavour; but despair produces inactivity and sloth.

Hope, even in the assistance of our fellow-creatures, will greatly cheer and support the mind. What a sure foundation, then, hath our hope in God! Though all human aid fails, God will not fail; nor can his almighty arm be weakened. Though your relations and acquaintance stand aloof in your adversity, God will never desert you, if, by being virtuous,

you are the proper objects of his care. He will give you strength and patience to bear your misfortunes, if he does not relieve them.

Piety, justice, charity, and benevolence, will secure to you the favour and protection of that almighty Being who controls the universe, and whose favour is better than life itself; it appearing to be one of his immutable laws, that the practice of those virtues shall, upon the whole, have happiness connected with it.

Though we should be unhappy in this life, we should still hope in God, because he will be our God throughout eternity: and though it may not consist with the infinitely-perfect plan of his government to interfere in order to make us happy in this life, yet we may hereafter receive an eternal weight of glory. On the other hand, how miserable must the wicked man be, who cannot extend his hopes beyond the narrow bounds of this world! God, who is the hope, the support, and the happiness, of the virtuous man, is, to the wicked, the terror of his soul. What can be a more dreadful thought than the justice of God to an unjust man! How must he dread to leave a world, in which is centred all his hope of happiness! Be virtuous, then, and the foundation of your hope shall never be removed. Heaven and earth may pass away, but God will always remain the friend, the support, the happiness, the unshaken hope, of the virtuous man.

## Chap. VII.

### OF ANXIETY.

MATT. vi. 25, 26.—Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink : nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ?

LUKE, xii. 22.—And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat ; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

I. COR. vii. 32.—But I would have you without carefulness.

PHIL. iv. 6.—Be careful for nothing ; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

I. TIM. vi. 8.—And having food and raiment, let us be content therewith.

It is evident that the care and thought, against which we are cautioned in the New Testament, must mean that anxiety which tends to destroy the comforts of life. Christ knew too well the advantages which arise to mankind from a proper care, a proper degree of thoughtfulness, ever to forbid it : on the contrary, such care is frequently recommended by him. We are to do our duty, and leave the event to God. We are not to be anxiously careful about the welfare of these frail and perishing bodies of ours ; but our principal care, our grand concern, should be the securing to ourselves a happy future existence, by the practice of virtue here.

Those who make a true estimate of the value of this life, and of all its blessings, will readily allow that any great degree of anxiety is a weakness, if not a crime.

Nothing that will end with this short life can be worth the anxious care of a rational being ; but

actions, whose consequences are to be carried into another state, and which will affect our future happiness, demand our utmost care: and yet even these need not be mixed with so much anxiety as to render our present life unhappy. God and nature require not this. If we steadily pursue a course of virtue, and be obedient to the laws of God, we may afterwards “cast all our care upon him, for he will take care of us.” We are, indeed, told that “we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling:” but this cannot mean an *anxious slavish fear*, which would destroy our present happiness. God desires that his creatures should be happy; and that those who diligently perform their duty should be the most cheerful and the happiest of mankind. If they are otherwise, they in some measure defeat his kind intention. God hath provided, for all his creatures, every thing necessary for their being and happiness. His goodness and paternal care appear in every object around us, and render any anxious care of ours altogether unnecessary. Yet we should not, from the apparent care of Heaven, which nature so evidently abounds with, nor from any thing we meet with in holy Scripture displaying that care, neglect the use of means to preserve and render life happy. We are instructed in the sacred writings “to take no thought for the morrow:” but this must not be taken in a strict or literal sense; we ought not, therefore, to neglect human endeavours, and to depend wholly on Providence. An indolent slothful man is not a proper object of Heaven’s care. Such an one is always a bad member of society: he contributes



nothing to the general happiness, which is the infinitely-benevolent plan of Heaven; and, therefore, he deserves not its blessings.

## Chap. VIII.

### OF CURIOSITY.

I. TIM. i. 4.—Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith.

TITUS, iii. 9.—But avoid foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and vain.

MARK, iv. 11.—He answered and said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all those things are done in parables;—Ver. 12,—that seeing, they may see, and not perceive, and hearing, they may hear, and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

ACTS, i. 7.—And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

ACTS, ii. 7, 8, 11.—But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew; for, had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man, which is within him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God.

THE whole of this quotation is not easily reconcilable with the law of reason and nature, though many parts of it are consistent with this law, and appear clearly to teach us what I have insisted on in many parts of this work,—namely, that mankind, in general, have nothing to do with the *mysteries* of religion. Indeed, I have doubted, and still doubt, of the possibility even of the *priests* understanding *mysteries*, and *unintelligible propositions and doctrines*, which are unfathomable by the laity: for, unless it can be proved that *priests* are appointed by God,—that their understandings are illuminated by super-

natural light, and that their capacities are enlarged in a *miraculous* way,—such knowledge is impossible. But this miraculous inspiration even the priests themselves do not pretend to. Hence I conceive that, unless such divine communication can be proved, priests in general can have no foundation for pretensions to knowledge and abilities above the laity. We very well know that many of them, in all religions, before they are made priests, have no superior rights or pretensions to be called to “minister in holy things;” unless their ignorance is to be deemed a qualification, upon the principle of “God’s choosing the foolish things of this world to confound the wise,” —Cor. i. 27.

In several of the passages from the New Testament now before us, the laity are forbid to pry into religious mysteries, as being vain and unprofitable.\* Indeed, these passages agree very well with reason: for, if the *mysteries* of religion are not to be understood, the prying into them must be an idle way of spending our time, and is only an useless or vain curiosity; to which we may add, what is worse, that some persons, from an imaginary knowledge of hidden things, often run into great errors. If the mysteries of religion are out of the reach of human reason, the priests cannot know any thing about them but by divine inspiration. “The things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit

\* Plutarch, who was a Heathen priest, in his discourse upon Curiosity, forbids all to pry into the mysteries of religion: so similar are Heathen, Jewish, and Christian priests, and so just is the observation, that “priests of all religions are the same;” viz.—avaricious, ambitious, and selfish.

of God." Hence, it does not appear that their knowledge of these things can be of any use to mankind, because they cannot teach them to others ; nor have they given any proofs that this extraordinary gift (if they possess it) hath produced any considerable effect in their own lives and conversations, so far as to render them such " burning and shining lights, that men, seeing their good works, may follow their example, to the glory of God." Nature does not, indeed, furnish us with any reason why the laity, or " those without," should be kept in ignorance of any thing which concerns their present and future happiness ; and, therefore, we naturally suppose that mysterious and unintelligible propositions and doctrines cannot concern the happiness of mankind, or be at all connected with their duty to God and to one another ; and, of course, that they cannot be any parts of genuine Christianity or of true religion. The reasons which are given in St. Mark, why the generality of mankind should be kept in ignorance, and why the multitude were, in his time, addressed in parables, are indeed very extraordinary and surprising ; viz.—Mark, iv. 12.—" That seeing, they may see, and NOT believe, and hearing, they may hear, and NOT understand ; lest at any time they should be CONVERTED, and their sins should be FORGIVEN them." It is the business of priests to reconcile this text with reason, and with our ideas of God ; and, therefore, to them I shall leave the task.

There is, indeed, a kind of curiosity which nature forbids, upon that equitable principle *of doing by others as we would they should do by us* ; and this is,



the prying into the secrets of our fellow-creatures,—the mysteries of one another. These mysteries, being natural, may be found out and understood, and afterwards an ill use may be made of the discovery: therefore nature forbids such prying, not only as an idle way of spending our precious time, but also as doing an injury to our neighbour.

### Chap. IX.

#### OF IDLENESS.

ACTS, xx. 35.—I have shewed you all things, how that, so labouring, ye ought to support the weak; and to remember the word of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

ROM. xii. 11.—Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

I. THESS. iv. 11.—And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.

II. THESS. iii. 10.—For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that, if any would not work, neither should he eat.

EPHES. iv. 28.—Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

I. TIM. v. 13.—And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also, and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not.

OBSERVE how well nature agrees with the New Testament in recommending labour.

The earth will not now (as we are told it did before the fall) bring forth corn, grass, and herbs, sufficient to supply the wants of the creatures which inhabit it, without the labour of man.

Moses represents God as saying to Adam, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.” This Moses saw was the lot of mankind in his days.

It was the language of nature then, and is so still.



Without labour, we cannot eat; that is, without the labour of some; and those who do not labour pay an equivalent in its stead: so that labour is a tax on mankind, which nature will not remit. None can live honest, however rich, if they neglect their share of the business of the world.

In this view, then, there can be nothing *dishonourable* in labour; for nature prescribes nothing that is so. Labour may, in general, be a mark of poverty; but it is not a mark of vice, of infamy, or dishonour, unless ordained as a punishment for crimes: on the contrary, in honest labour the very essence of industry consists, and industry is a virtue.

Labour is strongly recommended in the New Testament, and nature recommends it, by generally accompanying it with health, one of her greatest blessings.

We have examples of some very eminent men, who preferred labouring with their own hands, in the improvement of their paternal estates, to all the grandeur of the Roman empire. But *idleness* is condemned by nature, by Scripture, and by the opinion of mankind in general.

Idleness is the mother of vice. The mind will not be idle, whatever the body may be. The active principle within will probably be forming schemes of mischief. Seditions, tumults, and insurrections, are very commonly the fruits of idleness among the common people.

The rich and great, as I said above, will often court labour for health and amusement, as it generally proves propitious and advantageous to its votaries.

Labour procures necessities for the poor, and prevents sickness among the rich. Idleness, though adored by numbers, was hardly ever known to make one person happy. It is not only the parent of vice, but also of infamy, poverty, and disease; whilst honest labour is productive of health, a good name, and independence,—the three greatest blessings of life.

## Chap. X.

### OF TIME.

LUKE, xvii. 22.—And he said unto the disciples, The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it.

LUKE, xix. 42.—Saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

JOHN, ix. 4.—I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; for the night cometh when no man can work.

II. COR. vi. 2.—For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

GAL. vi. 10.—As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men.

JAMES, iv. 13.—Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:—  
Ver. 14,—Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow: for what is your life? It is even as a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

I. PETER, i. 24.—For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.

LUKE, xii. 19, 20.—And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?

HERE we see that the improvement of our time is a duty much insisted on in the New Testament. Nature also as strongly recommends it. The principal

argument for it, in both, is the shortness and uncertainty of human life: to which may be added, that, though life is short, yet our actions here will affect our happiness in a future state. Such forcible and cogent arguments, one would think, must have their weight with every rational being.

This precarious, uncertain, moment will, we hope, be succeeded by an eternal duration; and hence, if we are accountable creatures, or carry our inclinations and habits with us into another state, the things done in this short life will determine our fate in the next.

What argument can be more forcible than this to induce us to act with propriety, to make the best use of our time, and to conform to the laws of nature and reason, by being pious, just, charitable, and benevolent? These things God requires of us; and, if these duties are duly performed, death will never find us unprepared: he will be disarmed of his sting; he will not appear as a king of terrors, but as a messenger of peace, directed to conduct our souls to mansions of eternal felicity. If these duties are regularly performed, in our expiring moments, when all human aid fails, we shall be able to look back with serenity and satisfaction on a well-spent life, and with joy look forward to a better state of existence.

But, farther, the great uncertainty of our continuance here is a very strong argument for setting immediately about the performance of our duties.

There is no moment, but the present, which we can call our own: the next may find us incapable of



acting properly, or even of acting at all in this life.

Let not, then, the present precarious moment be neglected. It may be our last. Let us crowd as many virtues as we can into it; and firmly resolve, if heaven prolong our lives, still to act rightly, and steadily and uniformly to discharge the duties of our station. This conduct may prove of infinite importance to us; for God, who knows our hearts, will accept of such pious resolutions and endeavours, as well as, in all probability, reward them with eternal felicity; even though we should be cut off immaturally, and in the bloom of life.

“Not length of life is measured by the year;  
His life is long whose virtues fill its sphere.”

*A Poem on the Death of Gen. Wolfe.*

I cannot conclude this interesting subject without once more recommending the setting early in life about the great business of a future state.

In the affairs of this frail mortal life, wherever study and application are required, we think youth the best time for vigorous action, both of mind and body.

A man who is determined to grow rich by any employment, sets about it early in life, whilst his powers and faculties are strong and active. Should we do less for the treasures of heaven? for an eternal weight of glory? Should we spend the best of our time in the pursuit of vanity, and dedicate to the infinitely important concerns of another world only the dregs of life, when the pleasures of this world can



engage and entertain us no longer? Surely nothing can be more irrational than this,—nothing more ungrateful to God, or pernicious and dangerous to ourselves. “Remember thou your Creator in the days of your youth.”

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## CONCLUSION.

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I HAVE now gone through all the moral parts of the New Testament: at least, I hope that I have not omitted any material article. I think I have proved that Christ and his apostles taught mankind the religion of *reason* and *nature*; but probably I may be called upon to give my reasons why I think the other parts of this divine volume were not likewise taught by them. I acknowledge that my saying, it is highly probable they were not, because things *natural* and *supernatural* must always appear very improper to be blended together, does not carry with it sufficient conviction; and therefore I shall give one short reason why I think Christ did not teach, or attempt to teach, what are called the *mysteries* of the *Christian religion*,—namely, that they *cannot* be taught. This may appear to be a bold assertion; but I submit it to the determination of my candid readers, after they shall have seen what I have to say in support of my opinion.

To teach, implies, in the very idea of it, a power of understanding what is taught: but that which cannot be understood, cannot be taught: it is a ma-

nifest contradiction to suppose otherwise. Now the *mysterious* parts of the *New Testament* are of such a nature, that it is out of the reach of the human mind to form any judgment about them; and, of course, such parts cannot be taught mankind, nor can they concern or belong to human nature. Indeed, there are some hints in the New Testament, (as I have shewn under the article Curiosity,) which insinuate that the *priests* only had the extraordinary privilege of understanding *mysteries*; and that the laity, or “those without,” had no knowledge of the art of interpreting them.\* But, supposing this doctrine of *priestly sagacity* to be true, it by no means proves that the *mysterious* and *unintelligible* parts of the New Testament are parts of the religion of Christ, and delivered by him to his disciples.

The religion of Christ was, like the religion of nature, intended for general and universal use: he taught the poor as well as the rich, the unlearned as well as the learned; nay he, in a particular manner, took pains to instruct the poor, the ignorant, and unlearned; and what he taught them, they were certainly capable of understanding:† it would be a

\* The ancient Fathers, who pretended to the possession of miraculous powers, among other gifts, assumed to themselves the miraculous gift of interpreting the holy Scriptures. Now, if it require a supernatural capacity or power to understand this revelation, how can it be either a revelation or a guide?

† That the poor had the Gospel preached to them, Christ makes a mark as well as business of his mission: and, if the poor had the Gospel preached to them, it was, without doubt, such a Gospel as the poor could understand, plain and intelligible.—LOCKE’S *Reasonableness of Christianity*.

reflection on his wisdom to think otherwise ; and, therefore, it appears clearly that he taught them only the *moral* parts of the New Testament. I think I might rest the whole on this single argument, it is so clear and convincing : however, I shall examine this matter farther.

Notwithstanding the hints above mentioned, I cannot help believing that *mysterious* and *supernatural* doctrines are NOT to be understood, even by the *priests* themselves ; and hence, of course, not to be taught by them to others.

The very terms *supernatural* and *super-rational* sufficiently prove, in themselves, that the nature and reason of man can have nothing to do with them, nor with any doctrines to which they properly relate.

Let us apply the term supernatural to precept, and we shall immediately perceive the absurdity of it. A supernatural precept to human nature is a manifest contradiction in terms : and is a supernatural doctrine much better ? It is necessary for us to have ideas of a doctrine before we can believe it, as well as to have ideas of a precept before we can reduce it to practice.

If the faculties of a man must be stretched, enlarged, and raised above human nature, before he can understand supernatural doctrines, he then ceases to be a human being, and becomes of some other order of intelligence. So, on the other hand, if supernatural matters are to be lowered, and brought down to the level of human nature, in order to be understood by mankind, they then cease to be supernatural, and become natural matters. Now, as we



cannot conceive any other way how this is to be done, it appears absolutely impossible for *natural man* to understand *supernatural* things.

Bishop Butler says, "There are but two ways imaginable of God's making any discoveries of himself, and the things of another world, to us: one is by raising up our minds to them; the other, by bringing them down to the level of our understandings."

I own that persons may *attempt* to teach things which are in their nature *mysterious, supernatural, and unintelligible*: a man may attempt to teach *Diophantus's Algebra* to a child only three years old; but his attempt would be ridiculous. Now, as our capacities are no more equal to the *mysterious* parts of *Christianity* than a child of three years old is to *Diophantus's Algebra*, or indeed to universal knowledge,—so any attempt to teach mankind supernatural matters must be equally ridiculous; and, whatever the *wisdom* of *priests* may have inclined them to do since, I may venture to say that Christ and his apostles never attempted any such thing. They well knew what could be understood and reduced to practice, and what could not; and they taught only those doctrines which were upon a level with the meanest capacity. I own that something besides morality might be taught, and be made a part of religion. *Ceremonies* were a very material part of the religion of the Jews: these Moses taught them for some good reason, I doubt not; and what he mixed with these was pure civil morality, abstract from *mystery*: but I believe there never was any



law-giver, so wise as Moses, who ever attempted to teach mankind what their capacities were not formed to understand.

To suppose supernatural doctrines to be binding on human nature, or capable of influencing the conduct of mankind ; or that the belief of them should be required, as *necessary to salvation* ; is as great a contradiction to common sense as to suppose that a man should be required to act the part of an angel, and to practise the duties of superior intelligencies. Their duties, like ours, doubtless are founded in the relations they stand in to God and to one another ; and God requires of them, as well as of us, according to these relations, and the powers of perception and action with which he has endowed them, and no more. Every creature which God hath made, from the lowest to the highest, is necessitated to move in its own sphere, and cannot act any farther than its own nature admits. Whatever, therefore, man may do,—whatever any church, or any human arbitrary power, may do,—we may be assured that God will not require of his creatures impossibilities ; or, in other words, the belief or practice of any thing above the reach of their faculties.

As a farther proof of what I have advanced above, I shall bring to my aid some arguments taken from a celebrated writer, the rational Bishop of Gloucester, to be found in a treatise of his lately published, and entitled *The Doctrine of Grace, &c.* But here I would not be understood to insinuate that the learned Dr. Warburton's opinion and mine are alike on this

subject: no, on the contrary, he endeavours to explode the notion of Christ's being a republisher of the religion of nature; and in this very treatise, page 251, he says, "What better suits the melancholy subject we are upon, (namely, the advantages given to the common enemy by those who, to get rid of some urgent difficulty, are apt to forsake their foundations,) will be to show the various and unthought-of mischiefs which arise from the folly of attempting to change the nature of the Gospel economy from a redemption of mankind to a republication of the religion of nature." And in the same page the Bishop says, "The doctrine of redemption is the *primum mobile* of the Gospel system. To this the church must steadily adhere, let the storm against it beat from what quarter it may."

Here you see that we differ widely, and that I fall under the severe censure of the bishop, entailed on all those who teach that Christ was a *republisher of the law of nature*; a doctrine which the bishop undertook to shew to be fraught with "various and unthought-of mischiefs." It is, indeed, amazing that such a variety of mischiefs should be unthought of among the variety of rational Christians who have believed this doctrine, of Christ's being a republisher of the religion of nature; and that, notwithstanding what the Bishop has said or shewn concerning this matter, numbers yet believe that, had this been always the general opinion, fewer and a less variety of mischiefs would, if we may believe Mr. Bayle, have arisen from it, than from the doctrines of the *fall*,

*original sin, the incarnation, redemption, the Trinity, and the like.\**

*The Religion of Christ proved to be the Religion of Nature, by the Bishop's own Arguments.*

I say, that, though the arguments which I shall borrow from the Bishop were by no means intended by him to prove what I think they will fairly prove,—namely, that *the religion of Christ was the religion of nature*,—yet, consistent with his rationality and the dictates of his heart, he could give to reason and nature no less than he has done ; nor, consistent with his office as a bishop of the Protestant church of England, could he give more. The great difficulty lies in keeping a just mean, which he himself says “reason biddeth,” and which he recommends to the established clergy.

This great writer and rational divine, in the course of the tract above mentioned, ascribes to *reason* all that its strongest advocates can desire, unless it be that it is sufficient of itself to guide us in the road to future happiness : this, indeed, he does not allow ; but, on the contrary, he insinuates that something must be left for the holy Spirit to accomplish, which cannot be done but by its miraculous interposition.

\* The fall, original sin, election, reprobation, sufficient grace, incarnation, redemption, the Trinity, &c. which are the fundamental and capital doctrines of Christianity, and (properly speaking) the Christian religion, are all inexplicable by reason, contrary to it, inconsistent with it, or at least incomprehensible, and above the reach of our faculties.—See BAYLE's *Exp. of Manichees*, p. 64.

This, no doubt, is extremely necessary, upon the Christian scheme of redemption, from the great corruption of our nature, and the forfeiture of immortality by the fall of Adam. But the advocates for the pure religion of nature do not believe that every human being could be corrupted in consequence of a crime committed by the first man; and, therefore, any arguments drawn from this supposed event will have no weight with those whom we style *unbelievers*. They cannot, by their reason, discover why the sins of the father should be punished in the children: on the contrary, it appears to them unnatural, unreasonable, and opposite to all the principles of common justice, if considered with regard to God. It is, indeed, impossible for human governors to punish a father without punishing his children, in reputation, fortune, and the like; but the divine Governor is under no such necessity.

If the consequence of Adam's transgression was to be so very fatal to his posterity, one would suppose that God would have forewarned him of it, and informed him of the extent of his punishment. In Genesis, i. 17, we are told that God said to Adam, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Death appears to be the only punishment that Adam was threatened with, if he disobeyed the divine command; nor do we find that he was ever informed that millions and millions of his posterity were also to forfeit life and immortality with him, by partaking of his crime. Such knowledge of the extent of his punishment might, perhaps, have operated more forcibly on his mind than the dread of



his own immediate suffering: yet, upon the Scripture plan, we cannot suppose that this knowledge would have been a sufficient restraint upon him, or that any thing could have prevented his fall; for God foreknew that he would fall, and had provided the remedy. Now, as I have observed once before in this work, whatever God knows will happen, no power in earth or heaven can prevent; for it is a manifest contradiction to say, God foreknows a thing WILL come to pass, which may not come to pass. But, to sum up this argument in few words,—the punishment of the whole race of mankind for the crime of one man appears contrary to all our ideas of infinite perfection, and therefore by many is not believed: yet this is the foundation upon which all the *mysterious* and *unintelligible doctrines* of the *New Testament* are erected; the rest being *pure morality*,—that is, the *religion of nature*.

But let us examine this scheme farther, to see if our reason can comprehend it.—Adam disobeyed the command of God; in consequence of which he, from an immortal being, was rendered mortal, and of course could beget none but mortals: therefore, all his posterity would have had no existence after this life, if Christ had not offered himself a sacrifice to an offended God for the sins of Adam. God accepted the sacrifice of this innocent person as a full atonement for the consequences of Adam's sin; and hence mankind were restored to that life and immortality which they had lost by his transgression.

The death of Christ, says the bishop, was sufficient to restore life and immortality to mankind: “for he

himself became their sanctification and redemption, which were the first and primary end of Christ's mission. To instruct the world in wisdom and righteousness was the second. The first could not possibly be frustrated, or rendered ineffectual ;” (see page 257 of the Bishop's Doctrine of Grace ;) “ but the second depends on ourselves, jointly with the operations of the holy Spirit, (page 2,) who is another divine person descending from heaven on the part of man” (as Christ had done before on the part of God), “ to sanctify man to redemption.” The bishop goes on thus, in page 2, “ An atonement, therefore, for the offended majesty of the Father was first to be procured ; and this was the work of the Son : and then a remedy was to be provided for that helpless condition of man which hindered the atonement from producing its effect ; and this was the office of the holy Spirit : so that both were joint workers in the great business of reconciling God to man.” This, according to the learned bishop, is the foundation, the *primum mobile* of the Gospel system ; and he farther says, “ and this account of the economy of grace is entirely consonant to our most approved conceptions of the divine nature, and of the human condition.” (Page 2.) From this passage it seems as if the bishop thought that human reason could fully comprehend his plan, and that it is agreeable to our most approved conceptions of the divine Being. However, here I must beg leave to differ from him ; because, to me, there does not seem to be, either in reason and nature, or in our ideas of infinite perfection, any possibility of such an economy. For my part, I can truly aver

that I have made use of the faculties which God hath given me, in a candid and impartial inquiry concerning this doctrine of the fall of man, and the economy of grace consequent thereon: but, notwithstanding this, I still find that I cannot form any clear ideas or conceptions of it; nor can I fathom it by the line of my understanding:—it is so deep that I cannot search it out, or it is so high that I cannot attain unto it. However, I console myself with this thought,—that, as I cannot *understand* those things, they are not relative to my duty; and that a God of infinite goodness and compassion will not require of me the *belief* of any thing about which he has not enabled me to form any clear ideas or conceptions.

However, the bishop affects to comprehend this great mystery very clearly, and to perceive it to be “consonant to our most approved conceptions of the divine Being.” If so, it must be from the illuminations of the Spirit; agreeable to what St. Mark says, ch. iv. 11, “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are WITHOUT, all these things are done in parables.” If the understandings of bishops are, as those of the apostles were, enlightened by the holy Spirit, and if they have the knowledge of *mystery* communicated to them, while the laity (or those without) are kept in the dark,—then the wonder ceases. But, supposing this to be the case, yet those *mysterious* and *supernatural doctrines* cannot be a part of the religion of any but of those whose understandings are thus enlightened; for, according to Bishop Butler, they cannot be communicated to others,



He says, speaking of supernatural impressions,—“ But this we may be positive in, that, if a man did himself receive any such immediate impressions, it would be such a light within him as could never be seen by others ; he could have no way of communicating them to any one else.” Now, I say, if this be the case,—if these things are not to be *understood* by any but the *priests*, or *those within*, and that even they could not attain the knowledge of the *mysteries of the kingdom of God* without the miraculous interposition of the holy Spirit, and, after all, that they cannot communicate them to others,—it remains clear that human reason can have nothing to do in these matters. Hence it becomes a wonder that the learned and rational Bishop of Gloucester, as well as many others, should attempt to reconcile things to human *reason*, which are confessedly out of its reach.

This has occasioned some of the greatest Christian theologists frequently to contradict themselves, and to write in such a manner as hardly to be understood : and hence, those among them who would willingly own the force, the power, the divinity of reason, labour under the greatest difficulties, because they are obliged to afford to reason in one place what they would willingly refuse to her in another.

The doctrine of the fall of man, and its consequences, are the foundation of all the difficulties in the New Testament. The *moral* parts of it are easily understood, and will hardly admit of a dispute. These have for their foundation the *religion of nature*, the only proper foundation of any true and rational religion. The good bishop himself is kind enough



to own that the *religion of nature* is the necessary foundation of *revealed religion*. Hear this great writer in page 217 of his *Doctrine of Grace*, &c. where, giving advice to the clergy, he says, "They ought to explain how necessary a foundation natural religion is to the revealed; how it coincides with it, is completed by it, and so inseparably annexed to it as the foundation to its superstructure." In page 220, he says, "To ask whether Christianity was founded in reason or in faith, would be deemed just as wise a question as whether St. Paul's clock was founded in mechanism or in motion." And in the same page he says, "And now *revelation*, deprived of its foundation, *natural religion*, and of its best defence and ornament, *human reason*, lies a scorn to *unbelievers*, and a prey to *fanatics* and *enthusiasts*."

Here we see, according to this great writer, that the religion of nature is the foundation of the religion of Christ, and that human reason is its best defence and ornament; and a sure foundation it is of the moral parts of the New Testament:—but how the *religion of nature* can be the foundation of the doctrines of *original sin*, *redemption*, *justification*, *incarnation*, the *Trinity*, and the like, I should be glad if the good bishop would endeavour to explain; for, until he does this, what he has said above will remain a tacit confession that only the *morality* of the New Testament was the religion of Christ.

In the mean time, his argument certainly tends to prove, that if natural religion is the necessary foundation of the revealed, then nothing can be a part of revealed religion which does not lie within the reach

of our natural and rational faculties. Whether Christianity be thus founded in reason, he deems it impertinent to question; but he admits that, deprived of this foundation, ornament, and defence, it would be a scorn to unbelievers. Surely all this, if true, will nearly amount to a proof that nothing can be a part of true religion, or of the religion essential to man, but what may be understood by the *reason* of man; and that no propositions or doctrines can be founded in *reason* about which *reason* cannot form any conceptions. I am obliged to this great author for these rational arguments.—However, we shall find others in the same work rather more to our present purpose.

In the 17th page of the tract before us, the bishop makes use of the words of St. Paul, I. Cor. xii. 1, &c.—“Concerning spiritual gifts, I would not have you ignorant. Now there are diversity of gifts, but the same spirit. To one is given, by the spirit, the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge, by the same spirit,” &c. In the following page, the bishop remarks on these texts, and says, “The first he mentions is the word of wisdom, by which, I think, we must understand all the great principles of natural religion; and the word of knowledge evidently means all the great principles of the revealed.” Here we see that natural religion is mentioned first, as a foundation for the revealed; that it is called the word of wisdom; and that it is a gift of the same spirit which formed the superstructure, or the word of knowledge.—Now can it be supposed that the second gift of the same spirit should differ so widely

from the first, as that no conception can be formed about it? or that reason should be a proper foundation for any thing out of the reach of our reasoning faculties.

But, in page 115, this rational bishop comes still nearer our mark, when he says, "This wisdom from above, of which the apostle so highly predicates, is, we see, the same as wisdom revealed immediately from heaven; but, descending to man, is adapted to the capacity of his powers. So that heavenly and earthly wisdom have this in common—to be COMMUNICABLE,—that is, to be UNDERSTOOD; for to communicate nonsense, which is a nothing, is no communication." Here we learn that the wisdom from above, when descended to man, is adapted to the capacity of his powers, and that it is communicable, or to be understood by human reason. Also, that any thing which cannot be understood cannot be communicated; and, therefore, cannot be a part of the religion of man, or of the wisdom from above.

*Reason to be consulted in Religious Matters.*

As a farther proof of this, the bishop says, in page 122, "For, when reason is no longer employed to distinguish between right and wrong in opinions, religion hath no farther connexion with it." And in page 221 he says, "But surely none but a buffoon or a fanatic would, for his credit in jest, or for his interest in good earnest, discard the use of reason in consulting for his future happiness, when he has already found it so useful in procuring his present. Both the future and the present are acquired by the



right adoption of means to ends ; and this adoption, I suppose, will be confessed by all to be in the sole province of reason. Nor has this heaven-appointed guide ever given any just cause of complaint or jealousy." Here we are told—first, that when *reason* is no longer employed to distinguish between right and wrong opinion, *religion* hath no farther connexion with it. Now *reason* cannot be employed in *mysteries* or *supernatural* matters ; and, therefore, these cannot be any part of true religion.

Secondly, we are told that none but a buffoon or a fanatic would discard the use of *reason* in religion. The *religion*, then, must be such as *reason* can comprehend, otherwise it does not lie within its province ; nor can reason concern or employ itself about it, but must of course be discarded, as a thing of no use in a religion compounded and consisting of *unintelligible*, *super-natural*, and *super-rational*, *propositions* and *doctrines*. All such propositions and doctrines must be discarded, as being no parts of true religion ; or reason must be discarded, as having no business with them.

But farther, and to prove that reason hath much to do with every part of true religion, I take the bishop's words in page 128, where he says, " On the whole, therefore, that wisdom which divests the Christian faith of its truth, and the test of this truth, REASON, can never be the wisdom which is from above." Here reason is made the test of religious truth. Now can reason be the test of the truth of any proposition or doctrine that is above the reach of its faculties ? Surely no. Every proposition and doctrine must be



*understood*, before *reason* can be the test of its truth, or form any judgment concerning it. The good bishop says, as above, that *reason* is the *heaven-appointed guide*. Now can reason be our guide in things above the reach of our reasoning faculties? Surely no. The road is always supposed to be known by the guide; otherwise he becomes a blind guide: and certainly such an one heaven would never appoint. Reason must be a blind guide, when employed about the doctrines of original sin, irresistible grace, justifying faith, and the like; because these matters lie not within the province of reason.

The good bishop himself seems to agree, in page 198 of his tract, that, to make use of "blind scholastic disputation on original sin, irresistible grace, justifying faith, &c. would be running the hazard of confounding both the reader and himself." This is coming to the point. The subjects here mentioned will not admit of fair and candid reasoning. Reason cannot here be our guide, because the road is unknown to it; and therefore, in its stead, blind scholastic disputations are generally substituted by writers on these subjects; by which means they confound both themselves and their readers.

I shall borrow one passage more from this rational bishop's book.—In page 126, he says, "In the first propagation of religion, God began with the understanding; and rational conviction won the heart."\* This could not be done by any thing above the reach

\* The bishop has here strangely forgot his having said, in p. 72, that "this sudden conversion of the first Christians could not be the effect of mere rational conviction."

of our faculties ; nor can it be said of any thing but  
MORALITY.

*Nothing can be Religion, which we cannot  
understand.*

Put the whole of this celebrated writer's arguments together, and I think they will prove, better than any of my own, that nothing can be of the essence of true religion except things about which the human mind is able to form rational and clear ideas : that nothing can be required of a man, relative to his belief or practice, but what, by a due use of his faculties, he may clearly understand : and that God will never require of reasonable beings an unreasonable service ; which he would do, if he required either the belief or practice of what they cannot understand.

We cannot suppose that Christ would attempt to teach mankind wisdom which was incommunicable ; since this implies a contradiction, and would be exactly what the bishop says of nonsense, " a communication of nothing, or no communication at all."

If the wisdom descending from above to man is adapted to the capacity of his powers and the extent of his faculties, and is therefore communicable,—that wisdom cannot be from above which is not adapted to the powers and faculties of man, and therefore is not communicable.

I am willing to rest all on this argument of the bishop's, and desire no better to prove that the religion taught by Christ was a religion adapted to the capacities and powers of mankind,—or, in other words, that it was *the pure religion of reason and*

*nature*: for no other can be thus adapted ; no other can be communicated, because no other can be understood.

Though this celebrated writer is so great an enemy to the opinion that Christ was a republisher of the law of nature, yet he certainly allows that all the moral precepts and doctrines of the New Testament are nothing but a transcript of that law. The difference between us lies in this only ; viz.—the bishop believes that all the other parts of the New Testament, all the mystery of original sin, redemption, irresistible grace, and the like, are also parts of the religion of Christ, as well as the moral doctrines ; notwithstanding he owns that those mysterious doctrines are not adapted to the capacity of the powers of man, and therefore not to be understood or communicated, and of course have not his own mark of being the wisdom from above : whereas, I restrain the religion of Christ to the moral and intelligible parts.

Indeed, by what this great writer says in his Preface, one might be led to imagine he thought it fit that the generality of mankind should be kept in the dark, and that the Author of our beings had left us thus benighted : for he says (page 17 of his Preface), “ But they, who talk thus, do not sufficiently reflect on the condition of our weak and purblind nature, which can ill bear the bright and unshaded light of truth.” This looks as if he thought the Author of our beings had left us in the dark, and had formed our nature so weak and purblind, that it could but ill bear the light of truth.

Many reflections might be made on this passage ;



but I shall omit them, because I cannot help believing (notwithstanding what is said above) that the good Bishop of Gloucester is a friend to truth, and that, though these things have slipped from him, yet he can hardly suppose that a God of infinite goodness, the God of truth, would leave his creatures in so wretched a state as he also intimates they were left, in the following page of his Preface, where he says, "The pure and unabated splendour of truth, ushered in by wisdom, would have only added to their judicial blindness." I wish this was not a reflection on the God of nature; and I am sorry to find, in the writings of a Protestant bishop, arguments which would better suit a priest of that church whose distinguishing characteristic is the keeping her members in the dark, and preventing them from viewing the bright and unshaded light of truth.

I did not intend to make any farther use of the bishop's arguments; but I shall, however, mention one thing greatly to his honour, viz.—that he nowhere, in this work, appears to want that charity which is the greatest of all the Christian as well as natural virtues. I do not see that he anywhere makes the salvation of man to depend on his belief of the above-mentioned supernatural doctrines. In this he differs widely from many who have written in favour of the Christian system; and particularly from the great Mr. Locke,\* of whom I shall soon have

\* Mr. Locke maintains that the belief of Jesus's being the Messiah is necessary to the salvation of all those who have lived within the reach of the Gospel. See his *Reasonableness of Christianity*, &c.



occasion to speak farther. The rational Bishop of Gloucester does not appear to make such *belief* necessary to our being partakers of the benefit of Christ's redemption; for he says, page 257, "If Jesus did indeed redeem mankind, then did he neither preach nor die in vain; it not being in man's power, with all his malice and perverseness, to defeat or make void the purpose of his coming." And again he says, "For the sanctification and redemption of the world, man could not frustrate nor render ineffectual; for it is not in man's power to make that to be undone which is once done and perfected." Here seems to be nothing required of man, either in belief or practice, to entitle him to the immortality procured for him by the death of Christ; but he must partake of it, whether he will or no.

Nothing then remains to make that immortality happy, but the steady and uniform discharge of the duties which we owe to God, to ourselves, and to our fellow-creatures. These nature certainly teaches us; and, as free agents, we ourselves ought to perform them. We should do it with care, assiduity, and holy fear, and in this manner work out our own salvation; not waiting for any miraculous operation of the holy Spirit "to efface our evil habits, and to familiarize us to the practice of virtue and piety."—P. 68 of the same tract.

I hope that, by the help of this good bishop, I have now said enough to justify my opinion, *that the religion taught by Christ was the religion of reason and nature*; that none but the *moral* doctrines of the New Testament are capable of being taught to

mankind; and, therefore, that it does not concern us to inquire how, or in what manner, the other doctrines were introduced, became a part of the same book, and were blended with Christ's original system.

We will now leave the good Bishop of Gloucester, and try the doctrine of mysteries by the rule of St. Paul, who says, in his second Epistle to Timothy, verse 16,—“ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

By all scripture, we are not to understand St. Paul to mean all the writings contained in the Old and New Testament; because they do not all carry in them the marks of divine inspiration, and “ constitute a religious rule, perfect in its direction, for the conduct of human life,” (Bp. Glouc. p. 29,) or answer the purposes of instruction. The supernatural and mysterious parts of these writings cannot do this, as I hope hath already been made to appear; and therefore cannot be supposed to be given by inspiration of God, who does nothing in vain. Some think this text should be rendered, “ All Scripture which is given by inspiration of God, &c.” because no one could have objected to it if it had been thus worded.

The moral parts of the New Testament have all the marks of a religion coming from God, and constitute a religious rule, perfect in its direction, for the conduct of human life, as to belief and practice.” This is the very essence of the religion of nature; by which we are taught to believe the being and attributes of the one true God, and to practise all the

duties which arise out of the relations we stand in to him and to one another. In short, this is all, about which it appears that we have any concern.

*Remarks on Mr. Locke.*

In a foregoing note (p. 242) it is observed, that Mr. Locke maintains the belief of Jesus's being the Messiah to be necessary to the salvation of all those who have heard the Gospel: now as there are many honest well-meaning persons who live within the sound of the Gospel, and yet cannot thus *believe*, this proposition of Mr. Locke's appears harsh and uncharitable. But, to prove the difficulty of reasoning clearly and intelligibly on the mysterious parts of the New Testament, I shall make a few observations on this celebrated author's tract, entitled "The Reasonableness of Christianity," &c. and endeavour to shew how far this acknowledged master of reasoning differs from the good Bishop of Gloucester, as well as from himself.

It has been said of Lord Bolingbroke, that he never wrote so ill as when he wrote about religion; and the same may, I think, be said with full as much propriety of the great Mr. Locke. These instances, with many others which might be produced, will serve to prove that the *mysteries* of religion are not to be reasoned upon; and that even so great a genius as Mr. Locke was lost and bewildered when he made attempts of that kind. Read but the tract just now mentioned, and you will immediately perceive this truth to be confirmed by the many inconsistencies



he has there advanced. I shall just touch on some of them, as they relate to my present subject of *believing* or *disbelieving*.

*His Plan of Christianity.*

This great writer sets out with saying, that the doctrine of redemption, and consequently of the Gospel, is founded on the supposition of Adam's fall; and that the life and immortality which we lost by Adam were restored to us by Jesus Christ. But, to avoid being tedious, we will take Mr. Locke's plan as summed up by himself, and inquire into the reasonableness of it. I say his plan of Christianity, because it differs much from that of many eminent Christian writers, and particularly from that of the good Bishop of Gloucester, who asserts, "that it is not in the power of man, with all his malice and perverseness, to defeat or make void the purpose of Christ's coming." On the contrary, Mr. Locke says, "that nothing but the *belief* of Jesus's being the Messiah will entitle us to life and immortality."

"Who shall decide when doctors disagree?"—But to proceed.

In the 13th page of this celebrated tract, Mr. Locke says, "Those who have lived in an exact conformity to the law of God are out of the reach of death; but an exclusion from paradise, and loss of immortality, is the portion of sinners,—of all those who have any way broke that law, and failed of a complete obedience to it, by the guilt of any one transgression." And in page 22 he says, "But Christian believers have the privilege to be under the



law of faith too; which is that law whereby God justifies a man for believing, though, by his works, he be not just or righteous,—that is, though he comes short of perfect obedience to the law of works.”

From these expressions, and from the general tenor of his book, the two following propositions appear to be laid down :

First, that God required of man a full, perfect, and sinless, obedience to the law of nature; and that the least omission, slip, or failure, was punishable with eternal death or annihilation.

Secondly, that God was so kind to the posterity of Adam, upon his failure, as to establish another law, called the *law of faith*, wherein the *belief* of Jesus’s being the Messiah, or Son of God, in a peculiar and distinguished sense, was accepted instead of perfect obedience to the law of works.

If any of Mr. Locke’s admirers should doubt (as probably some of them may) that such propositions as these are laid down by this great master of reason, I entreat them to read the tract here spoken of. But whether these propositions are founded in reason and nature, or in rational and natural ideas of infinite perfection, will next be our business to inquire. Let me ask, then,

Is it reasonable to suppose, that a God of infinite goodness and mercy would require of his frail imperfect creature, man, a full, complete, perfect, and sinless, obedience to his laws; or that he would punish the least breach of them with eternal death?—Surely there is something horrid in the supposition, and

which appears to be inconsistent with all our rational ideas of infinite perfection.

I allow that Mr. Locke has produced various texts of Scripture to support his plan; and he might have added that command of Christ, "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." But surely nothing can be more absurd than the taking such passages as these in a literal sense; and I believe commentators agree that this command can mean no more than that we should, as far as we are able, or as far as is consistent with our imperfect state, imitate God in all his inimitable perfections. I own that, the more perfect the example is, the more worthy it is of our endeavours to imitate it, and the more useful it may be to us: but, as man must ever be conscious that he cannot attain perfection, and that, after all his endeavours, he must still fall infinitely short of it, a *command* enforcing *perfection* would be so far from proving an encouragement to him, that it would create in him gloomy *despair*, whose natural offspring is sloth.

Mr. Locke seems clearly to have foreseen these objections; and therefore he says, page 14, "Perhaps it will be demanded, why did God give so hard a law to mankind, that, to the apostles' time, no one of Adam's issue had kept it?"

It indeed appears that a law, which had not been kept by even a single one, through all the successive generations of mankind from Adam to the days of the apostles, must be extremely hard, and carry in it something very unsuitable to the nature and constitution of the human species. It seems nearly to imply

an impossibility that any of them could keep it ; nay, St. Paul says, “ By the deeds of the law no man can be justified.”—How then can it be supposed that God would give such a law to his imperfect creature, man, when he so well knew his frame, and the extent of his faculties and powers ; nay, when he foreknew, if it was possible to be known, that no man ever would or could keep it?—Such a supposition appears to me to be absurd.

But let us now examine Mr. Locke’s answer to his own very natural query. “ It was,” says he, p. 14, “ such a law as the purity of God’s nature required, and must be the law of such a creature as man ; unless God would have made him a rational creature, and not required him to have lived by the law of reason, but would have countenanced in him irregularity and disobedience to that light which he had, and that rule which was suitable to his nature ; which would have been to have authorised disorder, confusion, and wickedness, in his creatures. For that this law was the law of reason,—or, as it is called, of nature,—we shall see by and by : and, if rational creatures will not live up to the rule of their reason, who\* shall excuse them ?”

I wish that this eminent writer had not proposed the question, unless he had given us a more satisfactory answer.

Let me ask, in my turn, If the perfection of God’s

\* I think we may venture to affirm, that God will certainly excuse them, if they, in the general course of their lives, act agreeably to this law, and if they sincerely repent and amend when they have deviated from it.



nature is a reason why He should require perfection in any other being: because He is himself infinitely pure, must he require perfect purity of such a creature as man?—Surely such reasoning is unworthy the great Mr. Locke! But he goes on, and says, “That this law was the law of reason,—or, as it is called, of nature,—and must be the law of such a creature as man,” &c.

I agree with Mr. Locke, that the law of reason, or nature, must be the law of such a creature as man, and that no other law can so well suit a rational being. The faculty of *reason*, which God hath implanted in the human mind, is doubtless, if duly attended to, sufficient to answer all the kind purposes of his creation; that is to say, it is sufficient to lead us on in the road to happiness: but the excellence of this law is no proof that our heavenly Father would have punished every, the least, breach of it with *eternal death*, even though Christ had never come into the world; or, to use Mr. Locke’s words, “if God had not found out a way to justify some.”

To suppose that God would bring a creature into being, and give him a law for the rule of his conduct, enforced with the awful sanctions of eternal life and death, when, at the same time, he knew that this creature would not, or could not, comply with it,—does, I confess, appear very extraordinary to me, and is quite inconsistent with my notions of the Supreme Being.

The law of nature, no doubt, is perfect, and, as St. Paul the apostle says, holy, just, and good: all the laws of God must be so: but, as I said above, this is



no proof that God would require of his imperfect creature, man, a complete and perfect obedience to it. Is it possible to imagine that the infinitely perfect Maker of all things should expect from his creatures any thing in which he could be disappointed?

God certainly intends the happiness of his intelligent creatures. We cannot conceive any other motive which he could have for creating them : but then this happiness, we must suppose, is to be brought about by means worthy of infinite wisdom, and surely not, as Christian divines would make us believe, by *contrivance* and *after-thought*, which imply an imperfection in God, and that he either did not know how his creatures would act, or, knowing it, could not at once give them such a law as would fully answer all the benevolent purposes of his government. Either supposition appears to me to be a kind of blasphemy : and yet this, as I said above, is the language of Christian divines, and even of the great Mr. Locke.

These writers ascribe to God the attribute of prescience ; and they tell us “ that he, knowing Adam would prove disobedient, and by his fall involve all mankind in eternal death, provided a remedy, or found out a way to justify some.”

Providing a remedy, or finding out the way, are terms which may be applied to the frail, fallible, imperfect, governors of this world, without impropriety ; but, I think, by no means to the infinitely-perfect God :—nothing surely can be more improper—to say no worse. The wisest earthly governors cannot be

exactly certain how a law will operate, and these may therefore provide a remedy, in case the law should fail of answering the end designed by it: but my indignation rises when I hear such *after-acts* ascribed to the infinitely-wise God, who can never be mistaken, or do any thing which can possibly require *alteration* or *amendment*; seeing that he comprehends, in one infinitely-extended view, the past, the present, and the future, from eternity to eternity.

Let us now consider what this remedy was, or what way God found out, to restore mankind to that life and immortality which, according to these writers, they lost by Adam's transgression. It was—the death of an innocent being; the death of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; of whom St. Athanasius thus speaks: “Such as the Father is, such is the Son; the Father eternal, the Son eternal; the Father is God, the Son is God; co-eternal together, and co-equal.” And this, he says, “is the faith, which unless we keep whole and undefiled, without doubt we shall perish everlastingly.” When we put all these things together, we are involved in inextricable difficulties; and, if what the saint here asserts be really true, we must own, with the poet, that “the ways of heaven are dark and intricate, and that our understanding, puzzled in mazes and perplexed in errors, traces them in vain.” We are here no longer under the guidance of *reason*, nor can the lines of our understandings fathom such inexplicable doctrines. I hope, on my own account, as well as on the account of millions besides, that St. Athanasius

is mistaken :\* if he be not, “ strait indeed is the gate that leads to life, and FEW there are that enter in thereat.”

I shall only add, that, if the above-mentioned remedy was found out and applied by God to cure the evil arising from Adam’s transgression, which evil must be universal, it was certainly the best that could be applied, and will doubtless be sufficient to answer the kind purpose he intended by it. But surely Mr. Locke could not, with propriety, call this a reasonable doctrine. Human reason cannot comprehend it :—the mind of man, unassisted by a particular divine revelation, cannot conceive that the spilling the blood of an *innocent* creature can possibly take away the sins of a *guilty* one, or be of any effect towards reconciling a sinful creature to God. There does not seem to be, in *reason*, any sort of correspondence or connexion between the sufferings of an innocent being and the crimes of a guilty one. Reason teaches us that merely the spilling of the blood of the most meritorious being that ever existed cannot make a sinner less a sinner, or render the infinitely-merciful God more propitious to his creatures than he is, in his own nature, necessarily inclined to be.

If a man be not the proper object of divine favour, it is because he hath withdrawn himself from God, hath not followed the dictates of reason and nature,

\* This might not be allowed to be said, in Rome, of the saints of that church ; but, as the Protestant church of England has never yet asserted her claim to *infallibility*, it remains that her saints may possibly be mistaken.



but has suffered his appetites and passions to lead him astray from the road of virtue and happiness. When this is the case, surely nothing but a thorough change in his heart and life can reconcile him to God, and render him a fit object of divine complacency.

Whilst a man remains a sinner, he appears to me to be incapable of enjoying that rational felicity which God intended for him. Now it is evident, from both reason and Scripture, that a man may remain a *sinner*, even after the most efficacious sacrifice has been offered up for him: nay, upon Mr. Locke's plan, a man may not only continue to be a sinner, notwithstanding such sacrifice, but even, though he be otherwise a *good man*, yet he *cannot be saved*, unless he *believes* Jesus to be the Messiah. Hence, all that Christ hath done and suffered to obtain everlasting life for mankind may prove ineffectual, because many, even under the Gospel, may not be able thus to believe,—*belief* not being a thing within our own power.

This brings me to Mr. Locke's second proposition, namely,—That God was so kind to the posterity of Adam, upon his failure, as to establish another law, called the law of faith, wherein the belief of Jesus's being the Messiah was accepted instead of perfect obedience to the law of works. Of this law of faith Mr. Locke speaks thus, in page 20,—“ By the law of faith, faith is allowed to supply the defect of full obedience; and so the believers are admitted to life and immortality, as if they were righteous.” And in page 22 he says, “ Which is that law, whereby



God justifies a man for *believing*, though, by his works, he be not just or righteous."

From these and many other passages in Mr. Locke's tract, it appears that he looked on *faith* to be nothing more than a steady and firm *belief* of any proposition supposed to come from God; and to prove this, he has produced many texts of Scripture, of which I shall content myself with mentioning only two, quoted by him in his 22d page; viz.—Rom. iv. 3, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." Verse 5, "To him that believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

Faith, then, according to Mr. Locke, is (as I observed above) a steady unshaken *belief* of any proposition supposed to come from God: but the proposition to be *believed*, as *necessary to salvation*, and which will be imputed to Christians for, or instead of, righteousness, is that of *Jesus's being the Messiah*. This point he has greatly laboured through his whole tract.

And now it may be time to ask, whether it appears consistent with infinite wisdom to require the *belief* of any doctrine whatever, and to substitute such *belief* instead of that perfect obedience which he found mankind could not comply with?—Surely it does not; because what is here required may be as much out of a man's power to perform as was that perfect obedience, in the room of which it is substituted: nay, to some both may be *impossible*, without better evidence; for *belief*, as it always arises out of sufficient evidence, can never arise at all where such

evidence is wanting; nor can it, with propriety, be the subject of a *command*, as I hope hath already been made appear. In how wretched a situation, then, are mankind left, upon Mr. Locke's plan! They must either pay a perfect obedience to the law of nature, which he says no man ever did, and St. Paul says "no man ever could;"\* or they *must believe Jesus to be the Messiah*, or Son of God, in what our churchmen call the Gospel sense. Now this is what many may never be able to do, even though menaced with the punishment of *eternal death*.

This, if true, according to Mr. Locke, is the unhappy case of all those, at least, who have lived within the sound of the Gospel. As for others, they seem, indeed, on a better footing; for he says, in page 255, "There are many to whom the promise of the Messiah never came, and so were never in a capacity to believe or reject that revelation. Yet God had, by the light of reason, revealed to all mankind, who would make use of that light, that he was good and merciful. The same spark of the divine nature and knowledge in man, which, making him a man, shewed him the law he was under as a man, shewed him also the way of atoning the merciful, kind, compassionate, Author and Father of him and his being, when he had transgressed that law. He that made use of this candle of the Lord, so far as to find what was his duty, could not miss to find also the way to reconciliation and forgiveness, when he had failed of his duty." Here this great writer again resumes his

\* See Rom. iii. 20.

reason, which he seemed before to have entirely discarded in this inquiry, instead of making it, like the good Bishop of Gloucester, “the test of religious truth and the heaven-appointed guide.”

But to trace Mr. Locke farther. In page 245 of this celebrated piece, after he has given his readers the expressions which Jesus will make use of at the day of judgment, he goes on to say, “These, I think, are all the places where our Saviour mentions the last judgment, or describes his way of proceeding in that great day; wherein, as we have observed, it is remarkable that, every where, the sentence follows *doing* or not *doing*, without any mention of *believing* or not *believing*.” A very rational remark of this great author; true in itself, and suited to go much farther to prove the reasonableness of Christianity than what follows:—but, as it rather made against the Scripture doctrine of faith, and contradicted the tenor of his book, he adds, “Not that any, to whom the Gospel hath been preached, *shall be saved* without *believing* Jesus to be the Messiah.” How consistent these things are I leave the reader to judge.

After all, according to Mr. Locke, this law of faith, or belief of Jesus’s being the Messiah, does not, by any means, entirely excuse mankind from performing the works of the law; but atones for some slips and failures only, and will be imputed to them instead of perfect obedience.

Here we still remain involved in doubt and uncertainty, and want to be informed how far a man may venture to deviate from perfect righteousness, or what errors a right belief or saving faith will atone for.



There being no bounds fixed, how easily may a man transgress? How likely is he to depend too much on his faith, and too little on his virtue? Hence, it appears to me extremely dangerous to admit that God has substituted any thing in the room of virtue or right action, or that he will accept of any atonement besides *repentance* and *amendment*.

Indeed, if we could admit, with Mr. Locke, that the all-wise Governor of the world required of his frail creature man *perfect righteousness*, we might also readily admit that he would substitute something to be accepted in the room of it; perfect righteousness being an attribute of his own, inconsistent with the frailty and imperfection of human nature.—Hence, it appears that Mr. Locke's first proposition is too absurd to be admitted; and, of course, the second, which is founded upon the first, must also fall to the ground.

Mr. Locke's extensive genius, his uncommon capacity, his vast stretch of understanding, seem here all to be in fetters; and his *reason*, which shines with such resplendent lustre in his other works, appears in this to be greatly clouded, or else to be meanly warped to the opinion of the times, in order to rescue his character from the charge of *Deism*, which some Christian divines had fixed on him. Be this as it may, Mr. Locke's method of shewing the *reasonableness* of Christianity has certainly failed.

Christianity, or the pure, genuine, and unadulterated, religion of Christ, was founded on the religion of reason and nature; and, whilst it is permitted to rest on this foundation, which the eternal God himself



has laid, no power can ever prevail against it. The religion of Christ can never be separated from the religion of reason, notwithstanding all the attempts of *bigotry, superstition, and priestcraft*. Whenever any other foundation is substituted in the room of this, the religious system raised on it cannot be a reasonable one.

If, in any system, instead of piety towards God, of justice, charity, and universal benevolence to mankind, (which is the religion of nature,) the *belief* of certain propositions be substituted,—such a religion cannot be reasonable, nor fit to be embraced by rational beings, whatever authorities from men or books may be brought to support it. *Reason*, as the Bishop of Gloucester justly says, is “*the test of religious truth* ;” and the authorities of men and books, however dignified or distinguished, ought to be measured by this standard. Even the writings of the *Old and New Testament* should be brought to this bar, in order to know if they are from God, as we are taught to believe; or, at least, to distinguish what parts are so, and what not.

*All Authorities to be tried by Reason.*

Could we once be certain that the whole of those writings was really dictated by God, and that no merely human precepts or doctrines were blended with those of divine authority, these sacred books would serve for infallible guides, and no disputes could be raised about them. They would then be natural, rational, and instructive; easy to be understood by persons of every rank and denomination,

without comment or explanation. These are certain marks of a religion coming from God: these are the impressions of the divine seal; and reason will never dispute the authority. But if, on the contrary, when we are examining the Scriptures by the only certain rule we have, which is that of *unprejudiced reason*, we should find in them many things correspondent to human frailty,—inconsistent with our ideas of God,—*mysterious, supernatural, and unintelligible*,—*reason* will immediately pronounce that the composition is not divine: hence, that its authority is, of course, hereby greatly weakened; and that proofs, drawn from particular passages contained in it, will ever be insufficient to establish any religious system, or give power to any church.

But, supposing it could be proved that every syllable of the New Testament was originally dictated by God himself, and that he effectually restrained the writers of it from blending their own opinions and sentiments with his divine word,—yet, nevertheless, we ought to examine it, in order to see whether it still remains pure and unmixed, and whether no alterations have been made in it, by interested men, since its first publication.

I am sorry to say that the present appearance of the New Testament, in our English translation, amounts nearly to a proof that, if it was originally the pure and perfect word of God, it has since been greatly adulterated and corrupted; and we have no reason to believe that God has constantly and miraculously preserved it from those alterations which interested men may have been tempted to make in it,

as it hath passed through their hands : on the contrary, it appears that many parts of this sacred volume carry in them the evident marks of human frailty, and therefore cannot, with propriety, be ascribed to the inspiration of God. Many instances might be produced to prove this : but I shall mention only a few, which have not been much attended to by writers on this subject.

*Scripture Proofs that the Writers of the New Testament were not always inspired.*

First, the representing Jesus Christ as foretelling things which did not come to pass in the time he said they would, is so absolutely inconsistent with his genuine character, that it cannot be ascribed to the inspiration of God, but to the frailty and error of man.

In the xvth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, Christ is represented as telling his disciples that his coming to judge the world was an event that would certainly come to pass while some of them, who stood with him, were yet alive. In the 27th verse of this chapter he is made to say, "For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works : " and in the verse immediately following, " Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." And in the 34th verse of the xxivth chapter, speaking of the same event, he says, " Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all these things are fulfilled."



This event did not come to pass,—these things have not yet been fulfilled,—and therefore the speaking an *untruth* is ascribed to Jesus.

Indeed, divines have thought it their business, and have endeavoured, to clear up and remove this difficulty; and, in order so to do, they have told us that the event which Christ in this place alluded to was not the day of judgment, but the destruction of the temple, or of Jerusalem, his own death, or the conversion of men to his religion. Yet, if we examine this, we shall presently conclude that he is here represented as speaking of the day of judgment, and of no other event. The destruction of the temple is spoken of in the 2d verse of the xxivth chapter, and the contents of that chapter, as placed at the head of it, run thus:—“ 1. Christ foretellethe the destruction of the temple. 3. What great calamities shall be before it. 29. The signs of his coming to judgment, &c.” which, at least, show the opinion which the translator, or translators, had of it. And farther, in the 30th verse of the xxivth chapter, it is said, “ And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.” These are expressions no way applicable to the destruction of Jerusalem, or the temple, to his own death, or to the conversion of men to his religion; but such as are constantly made use of in describing the final judgment, as may be seen from the 31st and 32d verses of the xxvth chapter of the same evangelist, and many other places in the New Testament. Thus, notwithstanding all the *learning* and *sophistry* that have been employed by Christian *priests* to clear up



these matters, and to render them rational and worthy to have God for their author, the difficulty still remains :—Christ appears to have been a *false prophet*, or else those expressions, which are said to be his, were not really so ; which last seems, by far, most likely to be the case, especially if we consider that, when his disciples inquired of him about the day of judgment, he told them plainly, “ that none but the Father only knew of that day.” Hence, as he did not know the precise time, it was not consistent with his wisdom and great caution to say it would come while some of them were yet alive.

The same may be said of what almost all the apostles wrote concerning the coming of Christ to judge the world ; for they speak of that event as being very near at hand, as might be proved by many texts in the New Testament :\* but it is no wonder that the disciples should be mistaken, seeing the Master was so. It is plain, however, that these things are not yet come to pass ; and it is as plain that all those who foretold that they would be fulfilled long ago were not, at least at that time, under the influence of divine inspiration. God cannot be deceived himself, nor can he be the means of deceiving others.—God cannot be mistaken, nor can he possibly lead his creatures into error. Hence, whenever error appears, we may be certain it is human, and that, whatever a man’s pretensions may be, he cannot possibly, in that particular instance, be under the influence of divine

\* I. Cor. x. 11. Rom. xiii. 11, 12. Hebrews, ix. 26. James, v. 7, 8. I. John, ii. 18. II. Peter, iii. 11, 13.

inspiration. This is a truth not to be controverted : and surely divines had better let these difficulties rest as they find them, and at once candidly own (as many great men among them have done) that there may be errors in those writings which we are taught to call sacred ; for these inconsistencies are rendered the more glaring from their failing in their attempts to reconcile them. It has been said of the Scriptures, that every denomination of Christians may bring proofs from thence to support their own system. The Roman Catholics, for example, produce these words, “ *This is my body,*” to prove the doctrine of transubstantiation : and, to prove their right to persecute, they quote the words, “ *Compel them to come in.*” But the first is too ridiculous for *reason* to admit ; and the last ought not to be admitted upon any authority whatever, because it is absolutely inconsistent with all our ideas of infinite perfection. In short, I think we may venture to assert that “ Christianity hath suffered more from weak defenders than from all its adversaries.” The very idea of any part of the New Testament wanting either explanation or defence, is entirely inconsistent with an opinion of that part, at least, being of divine inspiration and authority, and is a tacit acknowledgment that human errors have crept in, and been blended with divine truths. Those who receive high pay for supporting the cause of Christianity ought, doubtless, to exert themselves in its defence ; but they betray great want of skill and caution if they remain too long in an untenable post, and be thereby too much exposed to the enemy.

If *priests* were to assert only the *moral doctrines* of the New Testament, and if they would give up those things which reason cannot approve, because they cannot be comprehended by it, they would then meet with very little trouble or opposition from any quarter.

The rational and moral doctrines of the New Testament were certainly originally from God: but then *these* are not *that word of God which brings great gain to the priesthood*. Things easily understood, and which lie on a level with the vulgar and unlettered mind, are not the things which they are concerned to support:—these, indeed, want not their assistance. The *moral* doctrines of Christ and his apostles are founded in eternal truth, and will for ever stand unshaken; though all the powers on earth were leagued against them.

But, as a farther proof that human errors have been blended with the pure word of God, as contained in the sacred volume, and that every part of it was not given by divine inspiration and authority, let us,

Secondly, consider the different conduct of St. Paul and St. Peter in their ministry, and the business they were engaged in,—namely, the conversion of both Jews and Gentiles to Christianity. That they did differ may be seen from the 11th to the 15th verse of the second chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians; where, though we have not the particulars of their debate, we have reason to think that the dispute between them was very warm. Now can it be supposed that they were both, at this time,



under the influence of divine inspiration? Surely no. I may be told that it was not necessary for the writers of the New Testament to be at all times divinely inspired: yet, it appears to me that they should be so in every thing relative to their ministry, in order to answer the end designed,—that of the most extensive spreading of the Christian religion: and it also appears to me that God would not only dictate to them what they should publish to the world, but that he would also preside over and influence their conduct in this momentous affair; for the examples of teachers are more especially regarded, and their precepts will operate, in proportion as they agree or differ from their practice. Now it is evident that either St. Peter had acted wrong, or that St. Paul behaved with great impropriety when he *withstood him to the face*, and charged him publicly with *not walking uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel*. See verse 14th of the chapter above referred to. If St. Peter did not walk uprightly, according to the truth of the Gospel, but, by his example as well as practice, taught others to do the same, in vain might he boast of receiving his commission from Christ, or of being divinely inspired. On the other hand, if he did walk uprightly, according to the truth of the Gospel, surely St. Paul could not be inspired by God when he said he did not do so. That one or other of these apostles must, in this instance, have been uninspired and mistaken, seems extremely clear. However, St. Peter was certainly guilty of dissimulation, in concert with other Jews, if St. Paul is to be credited; for he says, in the 13th verse of the chapter above



quoted—“ *And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.*” And this, we find, made a considerable breach between Barnabas and Paul.

Surely these differences and divisions had a direct tendency to weaken the cause of Christianity, and must appear absolutely inconsistent with the idea of divine inspiration, and with the belief that the apostles were a set of men chosen by God, under his immediate influence and direction, to teach his will to mankind.

The conduct of St. Peter was so inconsistent with divine influence, that some have been led to wonder why Christ made choice of him to be the foundation of his church, and invested him with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, as it appears he promised to do, in the 19th verse of the xvth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, where it is said—“ And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind in earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.”

This was, indeed, a glorious commission, a very important trust! And it is no wonder that *priests* to this day claim a share in it, and endeavour to prove an uninterrupted succession of authority and power from this highly-favoured apostle. Yet Peter, the unsteady, irresolute, and fearful Peter, gave up this commission, betrayed this important trust, and, in a short time, shamefully denied his Master:—nay, when he was charged with being a follower of Christ,

“ *he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man;*” as may be seen in the 74th verse of the xxvith chapter of the evangelist last referred to.

Surely, if Peter was at that time inspired, or was under the influence of any spirit but his own, it must have been that of a *lying* and *wicked* spirit, and not the spirit of truth and righteousness.

Indeed, it appears from the 22d and 23d verses of the xvith chapter of Matthew, that the great apostle Peter,—the boast of his successors,—the rock on which Christ built his church,—was sometimes under the influence of a wicked spirit. The verses referred to run thus :—“ Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord : this shall not be unto thee.” Verse 23, “ But he [Christ] turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me ; for thou favourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” In what light Peter appeared to Christ when he said this to him, let his successors determine ; but it appears to me as if he then thought him unworthy of the important commission which he before had promised him : and hence some have thought that this promise of Christ to Peter might be only conditional ; and that, finding him unqualified for so great a trust, he afterwards revoked it, and left the gates of heaven wide open to all truly wise and good men. It is plain, however, that Christ soon perceived a spirit of pride, a contention for superiority and power, and perhaps other vices, in his disciples : for, when they were contending who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, which showed the

grossness of their ideas and the pride of their hearts, Christ says to them,—“ Verily I say unto you, except YE be converted, and become as little children, [that is, as meek, as humble, and as innocent, as little children,] ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. xviii. 3.—This must have been a severe check upon Peter in particular.

For my part, I shall not pretend to determine whether Christ did fulfil his promise to Peter, and really deliver to him the keys of heaven, or not. But I think we may very safely venture to assert that the pious, just, charitable, humane, benevolent, man will always find entrance there, without applying for leave to *his successors*, or for instruction from *priests*.

At the same time, I sincerely wish that Christ’s rebuke to Peter, in the 23d verse of the xvth chapter of Matthew, could not, with so much propriety, be applied to his boasting successors; and that fewer among them were chargeable with “*favouring the things which be of men more than the things which be of God.*”

### *Apology for Peter’s Successors.*

However, the conduct of St. Peter should teach us not to expect too much from his successors, even supposing an uninterrupted succession could be proved. If the fountain was corrupt, can we reasonably expect that the stream should be pure? If St. Peter, who enjoyed every advantage that the conversation, the admonition, the instruction, the example, of Christ could give him, and sometimes also the benefit of divine inspiration;—I say, if Peter did



dissemble, curse, swear, and lie,\* can we reasonably expect that his successors should be free from these vices? Or may we not rather expect that other vices may be added to these? If the great apostle Peter deserved the rebuke above mentioned; if he favoured not the things of God, but those of men, and thereby became an offence to his Master; can it be expected that his successors will reject the honours, profits, and emoluments, bestowed on them by men? Surely no.—But to proceed. What could do greater discredit to the Gospel system, than the denying its Author? What could injure the character of Christ more than the manner in which Peter denied him? If then Peter, through fear, meanly denied his Master, can we reasonably expect from his successors steadiness, resolution, and fortitude, in the course of their ministry; or that they would, for the sake of Christ and his religion, endure any hardships, or neglect any worldly advantages? Surely such expectations are unreasonable and vain.

Whatever Peter was, those who style themselves his successors are certainly mere uninspired men, subject to all the frailties, follies, and vices, of other men; and, whatever their pretensions may be in other matters, they pretend not to inspiration. Can we then expect that they should be better than St. Peter? Surely no.

There are, doubtless, many pious, wise, and good men among the clergy; but they lie under one great disadvantage: the laity expect that *priests* should be

\* Matt. xxvi. 74.

better than other men, seeing they seat themselves in high places, demanding homage of the laity, as if their eternal happiness depended upon them, and that they, as successors of St. Peter, were in possession of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and could admit or exclude whom they pleased. The laity, (at least the more ignorant part of them, think that these men, so much exalted, and so highly-favoured of God as to be his ambassadors and vicegerents, should certainly be more pious, more just, more charitable, meek, and benevolent: in short, that they should be possessed of more virtue than other men. The laity look up with reverence to those burning and shining lights, expecting to see their good works, and to copy their bright example, to the glory of God: but when they find that *priests* have frailties, follies, and vices, in common with themselves, they begin to think them worse than they really are. Under this great disadvantage, as I said before, do the clergy labour; and the knowledge of this, one would imagine, should put them more upon their guard, and have a proper effect on their conduct. The laity certainly expect too much from the clergy, without considering that virtue is not necessarily connected with church-power and preferment, and that the choice of a bishop confers no real goodness. To check such unreasonable expectations in the laity, and to prevent the clergy from being thought worse of than they really deserve, I have here produced the conduct of the great, the highly-favoured, St. Peter, as an apology for his successors: but, at the same time, St. Peter's frailties should be a lesson to his successors, or those who

pretend to be such, and should teach them humility. His advice, also, to the *priests* in his days ought to be particularly regarded by those in ours,—namely, that they should not “lord it over God’s heritage, but be an example to the flock;” that they, as well as those they taught, should be clothed with humility,—for this good reason, that “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” See the fifth chapter of St. Peter’s first Epistle.

But to return to the article of inspiration. It certainly appears that St. Peter was not under the influence of divine inspiration, when, with an oath, he denied his Lord; and yet, if ever the gift of inspiration was necessary,—if ever the divine Spirit exerted its influence to correct the errors and restrain the vices of the apostles,—we may imagine it would have been done in this extraordinary instance of St. Peter, when the whole credit of the Gospel system appeared to be at stake.

It has been objected above, that it was not necessary for the apostles always to be inspired. I own it was not necessary that they should be under the influence of inspiration in indifferent things,—such as eating, drinking, clothing, lodging, and the like; for such things as these can have nothing material to do in any religion: but that the influence of the Spirit was necessary to direct their conduct in particular instances, as well as their preaching and writing, seems to appear from the case of St. Peter in the last-mentioned argument.

If God had only dictated to them what they should preach, and what they should write, and left the



manner of doing it, and every other part of their conduct to themselves, they might, by imprudent actions, have done a greater injury to the cause of Christianity than, by their preaching or writing, they might ever be able to repair.

Had Peter been mistaken, or had he even spoke an untruth, and swore to it, in any common affair, in private, between himself and his brethren, or in any thing that could not have prejudiced his divine mission, or done discredit to the religion he was teaching, —he might, in such case, be left to act and speak as a mere uninspired man: but for him to *curse*, to *lie*, and to *swear* to it, is a matter of the highest consequence!\*—Surely one would imagine that the divine Spirit, who made choice of him, as a principal agent in the great work of converting mankind to Christianity, would graciously have restrained him. How mean an opinion must those have of Christ and his religion, who heard one of his apostles say of him—“*I know not the man!*” How could they suppose Jesus to be any thing more than a *mere man*, when one of his disciples spoke of him in so contemptuous a manner? But farther,—what can we suppose Peter himself thought of Christ, at the time when he was ashamed and afraid to acknowledge him as a master, or even to own that he knew any thing of him? Surely Peter did not then believe him to be what he had before declared he was,—namely, *the Christ, the Son of the living God*. Surely Peter could not then believe Christ to be *equal* with God,

\* See Matthew, xxvi. 74.

and that he could command the powers of heaven to assist him. If he had thus believed, there would have been no room for his fear: but it looks as if his faith was staggered, and that he began to think Christ as weak and impotent as himself, and that his cause would not be seconded by any assistance from above.

This conduct of St. Peter must, at that time, have a natural tendency to prevent the spreading of Christ's religion, and to make it appear *to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*: and such difficulties as are found in the New Testament are to this day, with some, insuperable objections to *clerical* Christianity, or the Christianity taught by *Christian priests*; and therefore it remains with them that they exert themselves in order to remove them; and it is more especially their business to vindicate the character of St. Peter, from whom they pretend to derive all their authority and power. But rational Christianity hath nothing to do with those things. Pure morality, or the unadulterated religion of nature and of Christ, wanted no inspiration, but such as Job says every rational man is possessed of: "But (says he) there is a spirit in man [or mankind], and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." Job, xxxii. 8. This is all the inspiration that appears necessary to the knowledge of God's will, as taught by nature and by Christ. If a man has but a common share of understanding, he will readily perceive the beauty, the propriety, the usefulness, of the *moral doctrines and precepts of Christ*, and their natural tendency to promote the happiness of mankind

in general. The religion of Christ is so plain and clear, that men of very moderate capacities may understand it : but, as for the *religion of priests*, which hath been blended with it, few, besides themselves, can have any idea of it. The New Testament appears to be so much alloyed and adulterated by human frailty and fraud, that (take it all together as it now appears in our language) it can hardly, with propriety, be styled the word of God. It appears that the writers of the New Testament were sometimes left to themselves, and the copiers and translators always.

But farther, thirdly, to make it appear that the apostles were not always under the influence of divine inspiration, even in what they preached and what they wrote, let us produce the incontestible evidence of St. Paul himself.

In the seventh chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, and the 6th verse, he candidly owns that he was sometimes permitted to speak his own sentiments, and that what he delivered was not always by the command of God. The whole verse runs thus : “ But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.” In the tenth verse of the same chapter, he says, “ And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband.” In the 12th verse he says, “ But to the rest speak I, NOT THE LORD,” &c. Again, in the 25th verse, he says, “ Now, concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord : yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.”



Whether any other of the apostles were permitted to write their own sentiments in matters relative to their ministry, and were not candid enough to own it, I cannot determine; but this instance of St. Paul's is alone sufficient to prove, beyond contradiction, that God did not effectually restrain all the writers of the New Testament from sometimes blending their own opinions and doctrines with those of divine authority: and surely, if the *writers* of the New Testament were not always under the influence of a divine Spirit, we may certainly conclude that the *copiers* and *translators* of it were not.

A very eminent divine\* says, "It must be allowed, by the judicious and impartial, that many corruptions are found in our present copies of the holy Bible, and that we have not now this blessed book in that perfection and integrity in which it was first written. It is altered in many places, and in some of the greatest moment.—I could prove, I think, by undeniable and unavoidable instances, what Mr. Gregory, of Oxford, says in his preface to some critical notes on the Scripture that he published.—There is no author whatever, says this learned critic, that has suffered so much by the hand of time as the *Bible* has." Many other authorities might be brought to prove that we have not now the *Bible* in its *original purity*: but I shall rather recommend to persons to read it themselves with attention, and to form their own judgments of it.

The *mysteries* of the New Testament, "not being

\* NYE, of Natural and Revealed Religion.

adapted to the capacity of a man's powers, nor to be understood or communicated,"\* cannot reasonably be supposed to come from God; because the only conceivable end of giving a revelation to mankind must remain unanswered by propositions and doctrines which cannot possibly tend to reform men's lives and correct their manners.

The great Dr. Clarke says, in his *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, that "every one of the doctrines which the Christian religion teaches as matter of truth, has a natural tendency, and a direct powerful influence, to reform men's lives and correct their manners." Hence we may learn, that those doctrines which have not this tendency and influence cannot be parts of pure and genuine Christianity, be taught in it as matter of truth, or have an equal claim, with the *moral* doctrines, to divine inspiration. A religious rule which cannot be understood is the same as no rule at all: it, indeed, implies a contradiction, which we dare not ascribe to the infinitely-perfect God.

The conclusion from these premises may be easily and fairly drawn; namely,—that, as some things contained in this sacred volume appear to be of divine authority, and others of merely human invention, it remains to be our indispensable duty to make use of our *reason*, in order to distinguish the one from the other.

The great Mr. Locke, to whom I shall presently return, says, in his posthumous works, page 226,

\* Doctrine of Grace, page 15.

“ No mission can be looked on to be divine, that delivers any thing derogating from the honour of the one, only, true, invisible God ; or inconsistent with natural religion and the rules of morality : because God, having discovered to man the unity and majesty of his eternal godhead, and the truths of natural religion and morality, by the light of reason, he cannot be supposed to back the contrary by revelation ; for that would be to destroy the evidence and use of reason, without which men cannot be able to distinguish divine revelation from diabolical imposture.” To the same purpose Dr. Tillotson speaks, in the first volume of his Sermons, p. 86 : “ All the precepts of Christianity,” says he, “ are reasonable and wise, requiring such duties as are suitable to the light of nature, and do approve themselves to the best reason of mankind.”

But to proceed.—If St. Paul was not always inspired by God in the course and business of his ministry ; if he sometimes spoke his own sentiments, as hath been made appear ; it is certainly possible that others of the apostles, and evangelists also, might be in the same situation, and do so too : and hence, without using the “ touchstone, reason,” in order to distinguish the one from the other, we might embrace “ diabolical imposture” for divine revelation. How cruel then, as well as absurd, is it to deny the use of reason in religious matters, when it is the only certain rule we have, and to which revelation must refer.

Dr. Stanhope, dean of Canterbury, in a sermon preached before the university of Cambridge, says,



that “ the very temper and composition of the Scripture are such as necessarily refer us to some other rule; for this is a system of mixed and very different duties: some of eternal and universal obligation, others occasional and particular, limited to times and circumstances; and, when these occasions and circumstances ceased, the matter of the command was lost, and the whole reason and force of it sunk of course. Now, those things being often delivered promiscuously, and in general terms, men must of necessity have recourse to some other rule to distinguish and guide them in making the just difference between the one and the other sort.”

All this clearly supposes our reason to be capable of comprehending the religion of Christ, and that nothing super-rational can possibly belong to it. It also supposes reason to be a perfect rule; otherwise it would be very unfit to be made a standard for the Christian religion to refer to.

That the religion of nature is a *perfect* religion, no one will dare to dispute; because God must be the author of it. If, then, the religion of Christ differs from it, so far as it differs it must be *imperfect*. If they both came from God, or if the latter be an exact copy of the former, they must be both perfect; and, if both were intended to answer the same benevolent purpose,—namely, the making mankind happy,—the duties of both must be the same, unless God be changeable, or human nature cease to be what it is; unless God could know at one time what he did not know at another; or that the relations between God and his creatures, or between one creature and

another, were variable, and different at different times.

The religion of nature, and the pure, genuine, unadulterated, religion of Christ, can differ no more than an exact perfect copy differs from its original. Dr. Prideaux has said, that the *religion of nature and reason* is “the touchstone of all religion ;” and that “if the Gospel varies from it in any particular, or in the minutest circumstance is contrary to its righteousness, that is strong enough to destroy the whole cause, and make all things else that can be said for its support totally ineffectual.”

It appears to me extremely clear, not only from the reason of things, but also from the opinion of some of the greatest writers our church hath produced, that the *religion of nature* is a *perfect* religion, and that *morality*, or the religion of Christ, differs not from it. However, I shall only produce what Dr. Sykes says, to prove that what is called the religion of Christ, over and above his moral doctrines and precepts, is entirely useless, and mere rubbish. In his *Essay on the Truth of the Christian Religion*, page 204, he wishes “that Christians would not vend, under the name of *evangelical truths*, the absurd and contradictory schemes of ignorant or wicked men : that they would part with the load of rubbish which makes thinking men sink under the weight, and gives too great a handle to infidelity.”

In short, it appears to me that the religion of Christ was originally nothing else but pure morality, or the religion of nature, whatever it may appear to be at present ; because nothing but morality can be

of any consequence towards regulating the conduct of mankind. All other doctrines and principles, of whatever kind they be, cannot reasonably be supposed to come from God, or be binding on mankind, whatever authority or power may be brought to support them. Dr. Sherlock, afterwards bishop of Bangor, in a sermon preached before the Society for propagating the Gospel, says, that “the religion of the Gospel is the *true original religion of reason and nature*.” What can he mean by the religion of the Gospel, but *morality*? The religion of reason is nothing else.

I hope to be excused if I also, in this place, copy what that judicious divine, the learned Dr. Chandler, has said on this subject, in his dedication to Sermons preached in the Old Jewry; viz.—“Natural religion is the only foundation upon which revelation can be supported, and which must be understood before any man is capable of judging either of the nature or evidence of Christianity; and I am persuaded that it is to the want of a due knowledge of the first principles of all religion that those mistakes about the Christian are owing, which have obscured the simplicity of it, and prejudiced many against entertaining and believing it. If natural religion is not part of the religion of Christ, it is scarcely worth while to inquire what his religion is. If it be, then the preaching natural religion is preaching Christ. The religion of Christ must be understood before it can, or ought to, be believed; and it must be proved to be a consistent and rational religion, before men can be under any obligation to receive it. And, indeed,



why should not every man insist upon those things? The only consequence that I can imagine can flow from it is, not that the cause of Christianity will suffer, (for this will stand the test of the most impartial inquiry,) but that the rigid directors of the faith and consciences of men will lose their authority; and *human schemes and creeds*, that have been set up in room of Christianity, will fall into the contempt they so justly deserve. It is my hearty prayer to the Father of lights and the God of truth, that all human authority in matters of faith may come to a full end; and that every one, who hath reason to direct him and a soul to be saved, may be his own judge in every thing that concerns his eternal welfare, without any prevailing regard to the dictates of fallible men, or fear of their peevish and impotent censures."

If what this rational divine says be true,—namely, that the preaching *natural religion* is preaching Christ, and that, if *natural religion* be not his religion, it is not worth our while to inquire what his religion is; and farther, that the religion of Christ must be understood before it can, or ought to, be believed, and must be proved to be a consistent and rational religion, before men can be under any obligation to receive it; I say, if all this be true, then surely the supernatural and super-rational parts of the New Testament cannot be parts of the religion of Christ, as they cannot possibly belong to, or be parts of, the religion of nature and reason.

Thus, I hope, I have proved that our present translation of the New Testament may be erroneous; and that neither the *writers* nor *translators* of it were

at all times under the influence of divine inspiration ; that therefore they may, at least, have been mistaken ; and farther, that it is possible some of the copiers and translators, at least, may have intended to perplex mankind with unreasonable propositions and doctrines, in order to raise their own consequence, or to promote their own interest. I hope I have also made it appear, that *mysteries* can be no part of the religion of Christ ; that they cannot influence our conduct ; and, therefore, that they cannot be given by God to his creatures, as a religious rule, to answer the benevolent purpose of making them happy. If this be true, it will appear that all the *mysterious* and *super-rational* doctrines of the New Testament were, very probably, of *human invention* ; and, if so, that they can be no proper foundation for church-power : and farther, that it must be impious for priests to claim, from such doctrines, a right to direct the consciences of men, and to boast that they received such right from heaven. I have dwelt the longer upon this part of my subject, as *mysteries* have been, in all ages, the foundation of *priestcraft*, and, in the result, the bane of civil as well as of religious liberty. If men be not allowed to judge for themselves in the momentous concerns of religion, what have they left them worth contending for ? What is there that can be held in competition with this invaluable birth-right privilege ? Civil liberty is so intimately connected with religious, that they generally stand and fall together ; and it is notorious that in those states where religious liberty most

prevails, we find the greatest patriots, the truest lovers of their country, and the best men.

That *mystery* was, and is, and ever will be, the foundation of *priestcraft*, is very evident. Priests first persuade mankind that *mystery* is *religion*; and then they easily persuade them that their own understandings are insufficient to judge in religious concerns, and that we must apply to our spiritual guides for assistance. That there were priests in the earliest ages of the world, we learn from sacred as well as profane history. These taught mankind to believe that the practice of the moral virtues was insufficient to please God; and, in order to do this, they represented God as a being absolutely different from what he appeared to them in his works. This was the first, and indeed a very necessary, step for *priests* to take, in order to secure their own power and influence: for, while God appeared to his rational creatures to be an infinitely wise, powerful, and good Being; the father, friend, and benefactor of the universe, who desired the happiness of his creatures, and who created them for that end; all which, by an attentive survey of his works, men must believe him to be: I say, while men continued to think of him in this just and amiable light, they must believe that the practice of true piety, of social virtue, and the doing all in our power to promote universal happiness, would be all that could be necessary to recommend them to his favour. But this would by no means answer the ends of the *priests*, and therefore they soon undertook to give mankind a very different representation of God, and to clothe him with almost



all the frailties of human nature, as may be seen in the *Old Testament*; where he is spoken of as being a *jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers on the children, to the third and fourth generation*; as being implacable, and that he would not be reconciled to his creatures, nor accept of the most virtuous conduct, unless he was rendered propitious by sacrifices; and farther, that these sacrifices must be offered to him by persons of his own appointment; that they only were to be honoured with this high prerogative; and that no others should dare to approach the divine presence, or enter into the Holy of Holies.\* With such notions as these, and with others which were equally injurious to the character of the infinitely-perfect God, and which, out of reverence for the *Old Testament*, I shall forbear to mention, were mankind deluded; and, as right notions of God would naturally have led them to right action, so wrong notions of him led them into most egregious error and folly.

This was the case in the early ages of the world; and this was improved upon, till men sunk into such ignorance of the divine Being and his attributes, that they worshipped him under any form which the *priests* recommended to them, or which the maddest enthusiasm could devise. A dread of God's ven-

\* Can such representations of God be dictated by himself? Can reason and nature teach such absurd ideas of infinite perfection? Surely no. To whom, then, shall we ascribe them but to the *priests* of the Jews? And, after the Jewish priests, the Christian priests adopted the same absurd and blasphemous ideas of the supreme Being.

geance totally extinguished all affection for him, and the most horrid barbarities were practised in order to appease the wrath of this cruel and implacable being.

In this wretched state were mankind, when Christ nobly undertook to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of sin and *priestcraft* to the pure religion of nature and reason. Just and proper notions of the one true God were again revived in the world; and the making his creatures happy was allowed to be the surest way to please him. But this was no sooner done than a new set of *priests* arose, who, like their brethren of old, insisted on it, that piety, social virtue, and good works, were insufficient to obtain the favour of God; and that men would be punished with eternal death if they did not *believe* what was really out of their power to understand. *Mysteries* are still said to be religion, and we are taught that the *priests* only can understand *mysteries*. But I hope it has been made to appear that neither of these propositions is true: and I also hope that, as this is an affair of great consequence to mankind, I shall be excused this long digression.

However, before I return to Mr. Locke, I must add to what I have already said, that, if the translation of the New Testament is in many places erroneous, as numbers of learned divines allow it to be, and that a better translation may be made, surely it ought to be done. It is certainly the business of those "who live of the Gospel" to preach it in its purity, and to assist the English reader with a translation as near to the genuine spirit and meaning of the original

as possible. Indeed, this would deprive some Christian divines of that pitiful resource, in any pressing difficulty, of asserting that such and such passages are translated wrong, and that they have a different meaning in the original: this hath been very much practised, and hath tended to lessen the credit of the New Testament; for surely this is proving too much, and strengthening the hands of infidelity. A Deist might naturally retort upon such Christian divines the uncertainty of their revelation, as it now stands, and the superior light of reason; to which light the Gospel must be held up, in order to distinguish error and imposture from divine truth. If errors are admitted to be in the English translation of the New Testament; and if it is altered, as Mr. Nye says, "in many places, and in some of the greatest moment;" Deists may justly boast that *reason*, which Mr. Locke calls "the *candle* of the Lord," by far outshines the light of the Gospel, at least as it stands in the English translation. The bulk of the people, in this country, cannot have recourse to the original purity of the Gospel, but are obliged to take it as they find it; and yet they have souls to be saved, and an eternal happiness to secure, as well as the learned.

Thus might a Deist argue, in order to lessen the credit of the Gospel system, and to establish his own. I wish this thought may rouse the heads of our universities, those fountains of learning, to an exertion of their abilities in the support of that system by which they enjoy their honours and their profits.

To say that there may be a more correct translation of the New Testament, and not to set about



making one, proves either that it is of no great importance whether the vulgar understand it or not, as the Papists assert, or else that the rendering it plain and clear to the unlettered mind may prejudice the *power of the church*, and loosen the *fetters of priest-craft*; that it would be drawing back the curtain behind which divines hide themselves when hard pressed, and prevent them from confounding the unlearned reader with scraps of Greek, and from giving him the sense of the original as best answers their purpose.

If, as some say, ignorance is the mother of devotion, and the foundation of *priestly power*, it is no wonder that things are left as we find them, or that they should be rendered, by *craft*, yet more unintelligible to the vulgar. Be this as it may, I entertain a pleasing consciousness that what I have ventured to call the religion of Christ, namely, *pure morality*, or the *religion of nature*, may very easily be understood without a new translation, or without applying to the *priests* to have it explained: and, as for the other parts of the New Testament, which I have not a capacity to understand,\* I leave them to those who, without understanding them, still make them a part of their religion; and I heartily recommend such persons to the care of their spiritual guides.

I now return to take a farther view of Mr. Locke's system: and here, I think, I should make some

\* Neither do the most learned of the priests themselves appear to understand them; as, from the very earliest period of Christianity, we find them continually disputing with and contradicting each other on the mysterious parts of the New Testament.—ED.

apology for attacking so great a name, and disputing such authority as his is deemed to be. Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity hath, for many years, been looked upon as a very masterly performance; and he has been ranked among the most celebrated defenders of the Gospel system upon principles of reason. If he was so, or if this performance of his hath proved the *reasonableness* of Christianity, I am mistaken, and shall be obliged to any friend of this great writer if he will condescend to set me right.

*The Reasonableness of Christianity to be proved only by its Morality.*

If Mr. Locke, in order to show the reasonableness of Christianity, as contained in the Scriptures, had made choice of only the moral doctrines of Christ and his apostles, no rational Christian could have differed from him: but, to bring the *mysterious* doctrines of the New Testament to prove the reasonableness of Christianity, when *reason* can have no comprehension of such doctrines, is indeed very extraordinary.

*It is unreasonable to require the Belief of Mysteries.*

The doctrines of *original sin*, the *incarnation* of Christ, the *redemption* through his blood, and his being the Messiah in the Gospel sense, are certainly to be ranked among the *mysteries* of the New Testament. To make, then, the *belief* of all these doctrines necessary to salvation, as the church does,—or even that of the last, as Mr. Locke does,—is extremely surprising.

By the term *belief*, I have always understood an assent of the mind to the truth of any proposition, upon sufficient evidence or testimony appearing, after a candid and impartial examination of all its circumstances.\* The term *belief*, too, in my opinion, always implies such an examination, and such an appearance of truth; for, to *believe* without examining is ridiculous,—it is not *belief*. But whether, upon such examination, truth does or does not appear, whether we *believe* or do not *believe*, virtue and vice are quite out of the question; nor does it appear that either just discernment, or rational credence and assent, can be *necessary to our salvation*.—The reason is plain; viz.—“The faculties may be so limited as to be unable to trace the chain of intermediate ideas, and afterwards clearly to perceive the propriety of the conclusion.” The proper, the only proper, foundation of *belief*, must be an impartial examination, a great degree of probability, and hence, the appearance of truth. The subject of our inquiry, then, must be such as we can understand, and have clear and distinct ideas of; otherwise we have no foundation for *belief*. Dr. Whitby, in his “*Last Thoughts*, page 40, says, “Belief or disbelief can neither be a virtue or a crime in any one who uses the best means in his power to be informed. If a proposition be evident, we cannot avoid believing it; and where then is the merit or piety of a necessary assent? If it be not evident, we cannot help rejecting it, or doubting of it; and where is the crime of

\* Mr. Locke was clearly of the same opinion.



not performing impossibilities, or not believing what does not appear to us to be true."

Dr. Benson says, " For, to believe without apprehending, is to give your assent without ideas ; and to assent without ideas, is to assent to nothing ; and, to assent to nothing, is the same as not to assent at all." If I remember right, these are the words of this rational divine. If, then, what cannot be understood cannot be believed, how unreasonable is it for any *church* to require such *belief*, as necessary to salvation ! The church of Rome hath a thousand times been censured, by Protestants, for requiring the belief of its *mysteries* and *absurdities* as necessary to salvation ; yet what is there, among the tenets of the church of Rome, more *mysterious* and *unintelligible* than the *creed of St. Athanasius* ?

Mr. Locke does not insist on the *belief* of any doctrine as necessary to salvation, save that of Jesus's being the Messiah. He says, page 195, " For that this is the sole doctrine, pressed and required to be believed, in the whole tenor of our Saviour's and his apostles' preaching, we have showed through the whole history of the Evangelists and the Acts. And I challenge them (makers of systems) to show that there was any other, upon their assent to which, or disbelief of it, men were pronounced believers or unbelievers." Again, page 216, he says, " The faith required was to believe Jesus to be the Messiah, the Anointed, who had been promised by God to the world." Here again we may observe what a remarkable difference there is between this great writer's opinion and that of the established church ;

from whence some of the theologists of the church were offended with him ; and on this account he was charged, by Mr. Edwards, with Socinianism. From whence can arise this want of unanimity among Christian writers, but from their not understanding their subject?—But to proceed : In page 282 of this tract Mr. Locke says, “ The greatest part cannot know, and therefore they must believe.” I confess I cannot understand Mr. Locke here, unless he means that the greater part could not be eye-witnesses of the miracles which were said to be wrought by Christ in proof of his being the Messiah, and therefore they must believe them, on the report of others, as an historical fact.

It is necessary to our salvation, according to Mr. Locke, that we should believe Jesus to be the Messiah. Now, to believe Jesus to be the Messiah, in the Scripture sense of the word, we must believe him to be the Son of God, the King, the Lord and Saviour of the world ; for these titles the Messiah bears in the New Testament. How wretched, then, are those who have heard the preaching of the Gospel, and yet, after the best use of their faculties in an honest and impartial inquiry after truth, cannot believe these things ! According to the whole tenor of this treatise, their sincerity, their good works, will avail them nothing ; and the best they are to expect from their merciful Father is *eternal death*.

What can a man do more than make use of the faculties which God hath given him, in a fair and candid inquiry concerning this doctrine ? If, after all, he should not meet with sufficient evidence

whereon to found his belief, as was heretofore, doubtless, the case of many of the Jews, and is yet the case of many good men under the Gospel,—yet, according to Mr. Locke, THEY CANNOT BE SAVED.—I reverence Mr. Locke as a great author; but am sorry to find among his writings so unmerciful a proposition, whatever authority may be produced to support it.

The church, (that is, *the clergy*,) with permission of the state, requires our *belief* of many other doctrines, as necessary to salvation; and, before all other things, that we should believe the doctrine of the *Trinity*. We are required to believe, not only that Jesus is the Messiah, or Son of God, but also that he is the very eternal God. Mr. Locke did not go so far as this; for, after he had done with his favourite point, he says, in page 303, “The other parts of divine revelation are objects of faith, and are so to be received;” and in the same page he says, “but yet, a great many of the truths revealed in the Gospel every one does and must confess a man may be ignorant of,—nay *disbelieve*,—without danger to his salvation.” This is allowing a much greater latitude than the church allows. But he goes farther yet, and says, page 304, “Where, upon fair endeavours, he understands it not, how can he avoid being ignorant? and, of course, how avoid having his opinion suspended?” Here we at last agree, that *believing*, *disbelieving*, and *suspending our opinions*, all depend on fair inquiry, proper application, honest endeavours after information; and hence, in the final result, upon



the nature and quantity of evidence from thence arising.

Now, I think, we may fairly suppose that this last-mentioned argument of Mr. Locke's will hold good with regard to all the doctrines of the New Testament; even to that particular one which he so much insists on,—namely, the believing Jesus to be the Messiah: and this is all I contend for.

Mr. Locke was certainly a true friend to reason, and of course to natural religion. This very evidently appears from what follows.

“Reason,” says he, “is natural religion; and hereby the eternal Father of lights and Fountain of all knowledge communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he hath laid within the reach of their natural faculties.” Now, according to the rational Bishop of Gloucester, according to reason, and, I may add, according to common sense, whatever does not lie within the reach of our natural faculties cannot be understood, and, therefore, cannot be communicated by God to mankind. A supernatural revelation (though a favourite phrase of Christian divines) appears to me to be a contradiction in terms.

Having now done with Mr. Locke, I hope I shall be excused if I add in this place what Cicero says concerning the law of nature. “The law,” says he,\* “is not a human invention, nor an arbitrary political constitution: it is in its nature eternal and of universal obligation. The violence which Tarquin

\* De Leg. lib. ii.

offered to Lucretia was a breach of this eternal law ; and, though the Romans at that time might have no written laws which condemned such kind of crimes, his offence was not the less heinous. For this law of reason did not then begin when it was first committed to writing. Its original is as ancient as the divine mind ; for the true, primitive, and supreme, law is no other than the unerring reason of the great *Jupiter*." In another place he says, "This law is founded in nature ; it is universal, immutable, and eternal. It is subject to no change from any difference of place or time ; it extends invariably to all ages and nations, like the sovereign dominion of that Being who is the author of it." How excellent and forcible is this reasoning, though in an Heathen ! How strong a proof that the law of virtue was originally implanted in the minds of all intelligent beings, and that the *practice of virtue*, and not *believing* or *disbelieving*, will determine our present and future happiness !

But, as the term *belief* is often made use of in the New Testament, I shall examine it farther, and endeavour to explain it agreeably to *reason*.

*What is meant by believing in Christ.*

Christ says to the Jews, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me ;" as if he had said, Ye believe in God, and such belief is a proper foundation of true religion : believe also in me ; believe me when I tell you that God expects you should fulfil the moral law, or law of nature, as far as you are able ; that you are to be just, charitable, and benevolent ; and that he

will have mercy, and not [or, rather than] sacrifice. He has hitherto accepted of your obedience to the law of ceremonies, as well as of your conformity to the law of righteousness, because you believed both to be your duty: he has hitherto accepted of sacrifices and burnt offerings, as well as of that pure and spiritual worship which proceeds from an upright and pure heart, so far as you have been sincere, and acted up to the dictates of your consciences and the light you had. You believe that Moses, your great law-giver, was commissioned by God to require of you an obedience to the law of ceremonies, as well as to the moral law; and for this reason God hath accepted of your conformity to the former, as well as the latter. Believe also in me: believe that I am come to teach you the will of God, and to give you a more complete system of morality than Moses ever taught. I am not come to destroy the moral law, or law of nature, but to republish it to you and to the world; to show you the whole of your duty, and what God and nature require of you. The law of ceremonies you may abolish; but God requires the practice of the law of virtue; which law I have now undertaken to teach you. Believe in me, then, so far as to practise this law.

Something like this appears to me to be all that Christ could mean by believing in him. Many of the Jews saw the reasonableness of it, and did believe: many others, perhaps full as honest, examined, and we must charitably suppose to the best of their power, but did not find sufficient evidence to induce them to give up their expectations of a temporal king and



deliverer, which Moses and the prophets had raised in their minds. Their opinion and conviction of the certainty that their religion came from God were very good reasons for their not renouncing it precipitately, and ought to be a foundation for our exercising charity towards them, and giving them fair and candid treatment, equally with every other sect.

But, as I have said before, *bare believing* carries in it no merit; because it is involuntary, and depends on evidence. Indeed, consequentially or eventually, it may be useful, but in no wise meritorious. Even the belief of the being and attributes of God is not meritorious, as it arises from the irresistible evidence of his works: yet such belief must prove a most powerful incitement to the virtuous, and a strong curb on the vicious. The devils are said to believe and tremble; yet no one ascribes any merit to them. They believe, because they cannot help it. They have, according to the Scripture account, unhappily felt the power and correction of God's almighty arm; and therefore they believe and tremble.

The belief that will avail us any thing must be the foundation of, and be accompanied with, good works. Belief in God, or the having just and proper notions of him and his attributes, is a very just and proper foundation for the practice of virtue; because, from the knowledge of God's attributes, we perceive the relations which we stand in to him and to one another. This belief, and these just and proper notions of God, can never be sufficiently inculcated by those whose business it is to teach the practice of virtue. Men are, indeed, required to believe; and

they say they do believe: but then it is a kind of belief, an implicit assent, a sort of complaisant concession, or mechanical agreement, without rational conviction, and which by no means influences their practice, so as to be productive of a good life. We are told by our church, and that under the most awful injunctions, that we must believe the doctrine of the *Trinity*, and many other *mysterious* and *supernatural doctrines*. Upon this the ignorant, who are the bulk of Christians, say they do *believe*; and hence, I suppose, they fancy that they do *believe*. However, such *belief* can never be the consequence of clear ideas of those doctrines, or the foundation of moral practice; because the understanding and the heart can have no share in such assent.

We are commanded to believe that the blood of Christ will cleanse us from all our sins. But may not that *belief*, and the dependence consequent thereon, rather *check*, than *incite* to, virtuous actions. If we believe that we are to be saved by the merits of another, surely we have the less need of merit in ourselves. Upon the whole, it appears to me that, unless our belief be such as incites to, and produces, the practice of virtue, we may as well be *unbelievers*, for it will avail us nothing.

As far as the belief of any proposition or doctrine tends to promote the practice of virtue and a good life, so far it is good and useful. Indeed, if a man be truly virtuous, it cannot be material by what name he is called,—whether denominated a *believer* or an *unbeliever*, a *Jew*, a *Mahometan*, a *Deist*, or a *Christian*. The term *unbeliever* can be no real reproach,

because it is made use of by all the religions in the universe, and is the appellation which all the religionists and fiery zealots in the world bestow on those who differ from them in religious matters.

Believing in God, or believing that there is a Being of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, who made, and who governs, this and every other world; who takes cognizance of the actions of his creatures, and either rewards or punishes them in such a manner that, upon the whole, universal happiness shall arise out of his government; I say, such a belief seems to be a proper foundation of right action, or of the practice of virtue, without which practice mankind cannot be happy.

It is said, (John, v. 24,) " Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my words, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation." In this citation we see that the hearing the word of Christ, and the believing in God, are made the terms of salvation. However, this cannot mean barely hearing, or barely believing: but, on the contrary, it considers both as great incitements to the practice of virtue. This is sufficiently explained by Christ, in his answer to the young man who desired to know what he should do to inherit eternal life: Christ says nothing to him about believing or disbelieving: it was the practice of the moral virtues that was to give him his title to everlasting felicity: nothing short of this would answer his purpose; nothing was to be held in competition with it. His riches and great possessions were to be sacrificed at the shrine of virtue, and be made useful



to his fellow-creatures, before he could receive the reward of eternal life.

The practice of virtue, or the discharge of the duties which we owe to God, to ourselves, and to our fellow-creatures, is required of us by Christ, as well as by reason and nature: but to require the *belief* of *any doctrine as necessary to salvation*, is surely very extraordinary, for reasons given in the preceding pages. If we have sufficient evidence, we cannot help believing; such belief, therefore, is not meritorious: if we have not sufficient evidence, or do not understand the object, (as must be the case in every thing mysterious and above the reach of our capacities,) it is *impossible* we should believe; and to suppose that God can require impossibilities is glaringly absurd. Where *Athanasius* could learn his creed, or how our church could be induced to pay to that of Rome the *egregious* compliment of adopting it, is, I must confess, past my understanding.\*

Whatever frail fallible men may do, or whatever any church or collected body of men may do, a God of infinite wisdom and mercy will not,—nay cannot,—require of us, in belief or practice, more than in proportion to the abilities and powers which he hath given us.

I have endeavoured, for the honour of Christianity, to divest it of the mask with which bigotry and enthusiasm have disguised it; and to defend it on principles of reason—its best and surest defence.

\* And I firmly believe that this creed is past the understanding of any human being, even of the priests themselves, who say that they believe it.—EDITOR.

I have laboured to prove, and I hope I have proved, that the religion taught by Christ and his apostles was the pure religion of nature; and that it is consonant to reason, and to our most approved conceptions of the divine nature.

The eternal God, whom I humbly adore, knows that I have employed the faculties he hath given me in an honest and impartial inquiry after *truth*; “the truth as it is in Him.” If it be elevated above the reach of these faculties, I must remain in ignorance; but I cannot, on that account, be the object of God’s displeasure. I know that I am fallible, and liable to error: I therefore dictate to none; but earnestly recommend to every man to judge for himself, and to listen to the dictates of his own conscience.

It appears to me that nature and conscience dictate and discover to us the relations we stand in to God and to our fellow-creatures; and reason points out the duties which flow from these relations. Now, these duties appear to be piety towards God, and universal charity and benevolence towards mankind. From the performance of these duties will arise our own happiness; and, therefore, it farther appears that the love of God, and of our fellow-creatures, are inseparably connected with that first and most evident principle of nature—the love of ourselves. All these seem to be interwoven with our very frame, by the Author of our being. This communication of God originally to the human heart, I think, we may style natural religion. If there are any other relations, or any other duties, I confess I am unacquainted with them: I think there can be no other; and I also

think that these are clearly discoverable by the light of nature only, and that a *supernatural revelation* is, as I said before, a manifest contradiction.

The *moral* doctrines and precepts of Christ and his apostles appear to me to be a fair and perfect transcript of this divine original ; and, therefore, I style *these*, and *these* only, the religion of Christ, or Christianity : and, for this reason also, I look on it to be the only true *written* revelation of God's will to mankind, amongst all the various revelations, or what are so called, in the world.

*Every Sect pretends that its Religion is from God.*

I am sensible that the advocates of every other religion make the same pretensions ; but I deny that any, I am yet acquainted with, have equal proof of the divinity of their system with the votaries of the *moral* doctrines and precepts of Jesus Christ. But here I would be understood not to take into this account those who profess only the *religion of nature*, who practise the duties prescribed by their own consciences, and have not joined themselves to any particular communion or sect : these cannot be wrong if they are sincere ; because conscience will always be a safe and unerring guide in all religious concerns, and *reason* “ the only proper test of religious truth.” But let us examine this matter a little farther, and then conclude.

The advocates of every sect allow that there is but one true religion in the world ; and, notwithstanding that such an assertion reflects highly on the justice and goodness of the Supreme Being, they still assert



that *theirs* is this true religion, and that *they* only are in possession of this invaluable jewel, this pearl of great price.

Now, if it be allowed that there is but one true religion intended by God for universal use, it certainly is the principal business of every one to find it out and embrace it: but, in order to do this, and to distinguish the gold from the dross, we should candidly and impartially examine the pretensions of every religious sect throughout the known world: a task extremely difficult, if not impossible to be performed; and therefore, I presume, was never attempted. There are very few who have had the ability and the opportunity to examine many, amongst the almost numberless religious systems which have obtained in the world: however, those within our reach it certainly is our duty to examine. But, before we begin this important inquiry, it will be necessary to do two things: first, to divest ourselves, as much as possible, of any prejudices we may have imbibed for the religion we were educated in, that we may examine the religion of our own country with the same candour and impartiality with which we examine that of others: next, we should fix in our own minds some certain marks or characteristics of a true religion; for, without previously doing these two things, our examination will be useless, and not answer the purpose intended by it.

We begin then; and, in order to collect all the assistance we can, we extend our inquiries to the professors of each religion, and we soon find that they all pretend to the *seal of heaven*, the certain criterion

of a religion's coming from God, and that all others are false and counterfeit; and, what is worthy of remark, the principal and distinguishing characteristics of divinity, in almost all of them, we find to be that of *miracles*; which, by the bye, seems to be an argument that *miracles*, or *histories of miracles*, will ever be an insufficient proof of the truth of any religion; especially if we consider that God is said sometimes to have permitted miracles to be wrought even by the agency of *evil spirits*.

Still remaining in doubt and uncertainty, and finding the face of the earth overspread, like a deluge, with *ignorance*, *superstition*, *enthusiasm*, *bigotry*, *priestcraft*, and *self-interest*, we return, like the dove into the ark, without finding where to rest the soles of our feet. From without we gain no information in regard to this important inquiry; our guides either not knowing the way themselves, or refusing to lead others into it.

Being thus come back again to the place from whence we set out, we naturally reason with ourselves in this manner: If God hath given a religion to mankind, to be the universal rule of their conduct, and if no individual can attain eternal happiness without knowing and embracing it,\* surely it is the business of every man to examine and judge for himself, and not one for another; because no one can become accountable for the opinions and actions of another, nor indeed would take them on himself, if able so to do: besides, it would be a more trifling

\* A tenet of the Romish, as well as of some other, churches.

excuse to say, *My priest told me I should believe this, or do this, and I did it*, than that made by Adam for his eating the forbidden fruit. What can we then conclude, but that, if there be any certain, unerring, heaven-appointed, guide to man, it must be his own conscience? "Let us commune, then, with our own hearts, and be still:" let us cease our inquiries from men, who are all, like ourselves, liable to error: let us depend no longer on the opinions of others, but open the book of *nature*, read the page there presented to us, and drink of the pure stream from the fountain of truth, uncorrupted by *ignorance*, *bigotry*, or *interested priestcraft*. Let us turn our thoughts inward, and ask ourselves seriously, Whether it be probable that God has given to mankind any *written* revelation immediately from himself, and under his special and particular direction; in doing which he effectually restrained the publishers, transcribers, or translators, of it from blending any of their own opinions and sentiments with the pure and perfect word thus delivered to them? Will not our consciences answer, that it is highly probable no such written revelation has been made? And for this reason, among many others, namely,—that such a revelation must be necessary to the happiness of mankind, or God would not have made it: if necessary for any, then for all; and it is inconsistent with all our ideas of the justice and goodness of the Parent of mankind, to suppose that he would not make it *universal*. It would be a reflection on the moral character of the Deity, to suppose one individual of the human race to be so unhappily circumstanced, as to have no



opportunity of knowing and embracing the *only religion* by which he could attain eternal happiness.

Again, if such a revelation had been made to mankind, it would have been most certainly distinguished from all pretended revelations, by some obvious external marks and tokens of a divine original; not by a pillar of fire or of smoke, to direct one nation only; but such as would attract the notice, and fix the opinions, of mankind universally, and be to them all an infallible guide, through the wilderness of this world, to a state of perfect and consummate happiness.

But farther, such a revelation would also, most certainly, have some internal marks of divinity. We may reasonably suppose, first, that it would be plain, clear, and intelligible, suited to all situations of time and place, and to the meanest as well as the most enlarged capacity: it would want no comments, no paraphrases, no explanations; for can we suppose that, when God speaks to his creatures, he would do it in a language which they could not understand? or that He who formed the power of conception in the human mind should ever stand in need of an *interpreter*? Surely no. Secondly, we may reasonably suppose that the doctrines of such a revelation would be pure, unmixed with perplexing *mysteries* or useless *ceremonies*, and that its precepts would contain the most sublime morality, the practice of which would have a direct tendency to promote universal happiness.

Finally, such a religion would most certainly approve itself to the consciences of every individual of the human race, by being a perfect copy from that

perfect original, *the religion of reason and nature* ; to which nothing can be added, by man, that would improve it ; nothing blended with it, but what would prove an alloy, and lessen its intrinsic value.

The *religion of nature*, then, is the standard by which we should measure the merits of all other religions ; and that which approaches nearest to the purity and perfection of this, we should esteem the best : and, if we look on established religion as useful, political, and productive of order in society, we should (if for the sake of example only) join ourselves to that which our conscience thus recommends.

It appears to me that the pure and genuine religion of Christ, unadulterated, has the fairest claim to our regard, upon the principles before established : but, by the religion of Christ, I would always be understood to mean his *moral doctrines and precepts* ; and therefore I earnestly recommend, that we make use of our reason to distinguish those parts of Christianity which are agreeable to nature and to what God has written in our hearts, from those parts which, for many reasons given in these pages, must be the *inventions of men*, whatever we may be required to believe concerning them.

*The Author has made choice of this ; still rejecting the mysterious Parts, as not being the true Religion of Christ.*

The moral doctrines and precepts of Christ are exactly such as nature teaches ; such as my conscience

approves ; and therefore I prefer his\* religion to any other established religion that I am acquainted with.

I reverence the character of CHRIST, and endeavour to practise his precepts, because my conscience tells me that they are reasonable, natural, and productive of human felicity ; and for this reason I denominate myself

### A RATIONAL CHRISTIAN.

\* The author of this work supposes, all along, that the religion of *Christ* is to be learned from our present *English* translation of the New Testament ; and, therefore, should any person think it worth while, by way of finding fault, to tell him that he has mistaken the sense of various passages, from his want of a competent knowledge of the Hebrew or Greek language, it will certainly appear to be a reflection on the copiers and translators of this divine volume, but not an answer to, or reflection on, his work ; and to such no other reply will be made than this : namely, - If the translation be really so defective, that a mere *English* reader cannot learn his duty from it, why have we not a better ? If it should be said farther, that the true spirit and meaning of the *original* cannot be carried into the *English* tongue, it would be like asserting that the New Testament was the word of God in *Hebrew* or *Greek*, but that we cannot have it so in *English*. This carries the reflection still higher, and cannot deserve any reply at all.



## APPENDIX.

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### OF A FUTURE STATE OF RETRIBUTION.

AFTER the preceding work was nearly printed off, a judicious friend of mine observed to me, that, though I had all along supposed and allowed the doctrine of a future state of retribution, yet I had hardly taken a step to prove it to be a natural doctrine, which it was certainly my business to do: for that, as it is a doctrine expressly taught by Christ and his apostles, and as I had presumed that the religion of Christ was the religion of nature revived and republished to the world, I ought surely to offer some arguments to prove that this doctrine is not peculiar to Christianity, as many have asserted, but that it is a part of the primitive religion, revealed by God himself to mankind.\* I was greatly obliged to my friend for the

\* We do not find that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul was established in any one of the books attributed to Moses. It appears that it was during the Babylonish captivity that the Jews learnt the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, taught by Zoroaster to the Persians, but which the Hebrew legislator did not know, or at least he left his people ignorant of it. How, then, are the Christians able to reconcile the utility or the necessity of the doctrine of another life with the profound silence that this legislator of the Jews, inspired by the Divinity, has kept upon an article that they believe so important? The Pharisees, who were Christ's greatest enemies and persecutors, believed in the doctrine of the resurrection and a future state; the Sadducees did not.—EDITOR.

hint, though it came too late for me to place the chapter in that part of the work where I wished to have had it ; namely,—the second in the first Book of Moral Duties, immediately following that on the Being and Attributes of God. For, though neither of these chapters appertain absolutely to morality, yet the former appears to be the ground-work and foundation of it, and the latter to be the ultimate view of, and a very powerful incentive to, right action. Both these doctrines, if duly considered, will naturally have a very great effect on our conduct, and will also tend to promote the happiness of all good men, even in this world.

The thought of a future state, where virtue will be rewarded, and vice punished,—where all the seeming difficulties, which appear to us in this life, will be cleared up and reconciled, and the apparent unequal distributions of good and evil be accounted for, and be balanced by infinite wisdom and goodness,—is certainly a most pleasing reflection to the virtuous man, and will powerfully support him under the most pressing evils of this life. Without this cheering prospect, and that inward satisfaction which arises in the breast of a good man on a review of his actions, (which inward satisfaction may probably be greatly increased by the prospect of a future state ;) I say, without this prospect, the good man might readily believe that the children of this world were not only wiser, but also happier, in their generation, than the children of light, and be tempted almost to renounce the precepts of virtue.

The doctrine of a future state of retribution is

certainly of the greatest importance to mankind;\* and I shall endeavour to prove it to be taught in the religion of nature, by three different arguments.

First,—From our natural notions of God and his attributes, his wisdom, his goodness, and his absolute impartiality.

Secondly,—From the natural feelings and desires of mankind :† and,

Thirdly,—From that knowledge of it, which it is evident the sages of antiquity had, long before the appearance of Christ in the world.‡

First, then, I am to prove that the doctrine of a future state was a natural doctrine, from our natural notions of God and his attributes ; from his wisdom, his goodness, and his absolute impartiality.

If the doctrine of a future state so evidently affects the moral conduct of mankind, and is of such great consequence to their happiness, as the Gospel teaches, and as we naturally suppose it to be, it will certainly appear to have always been of the same importance, and that, therefore, the kind Parent of the universe,

\* This doctrine is certainly made of the greatest importance to mankind by their priests, who, I firmly believe, from this doctrine alone, have acquired all their power and influence over the human mind during this life.—EDITOR.

† The natural feelings and desires of all mankind are to be powerful, rich, and happy, during their existence on earth ; but this is no proof that they do enjoy them. All men desire to live for ever : therefore, say the partisans of a future state, they will live for ever.—EDITOR.

‡ I cannot learn from whence the sages of antiquity derived their knowledge of a future state, any more than the sages of the present day.—EDITOR.



who is no respecter of persons, and who certainly desires the happiness of all, did most clearly reveal it to mankind in the early ages of the world ; though we cannot readily account how it came to be so obscured, that none, but a few philosophers and sages, appear to have known any thing about it at the advent of Christ : neither can we account how this important doctrine should be *unknown* to Moses ; or, at least, thought of so little consequence by him, that he made it no part of the Jewish religion ; and on the truth of which the New Testament is said to be founded. But an attempt to account for every thing would be vain and fruitless. Perhaps it is impossible for God himself to give free beings a religious system that would operate so powerfully, and so affect their actions, as to produce universal happiness, without destroying their freedom. I therefore suppose that God originally gave mankind those laws which, every circumstance considered, were best suited to promote their happiness both here and hereafter : for, otherwise, he would appear to be less wise, as well as less benevolent, than we have reason to believe him to be, and would have acted inconsistent with infinite perfection ; for, as human nature will still be human nature, and as nothing can arise in the frame and constitution of man which was not originally known to God,—nothing that could any way vary the relation we stand in to him and to one another,—so we may reasonably suppose that the laws which he originally gave to mankind were the best that could be given, and such as could never need alteration or amendment : for, if we admit the contrary of this,

we know not where to stop, but may be in constant expectation of new systems of laws from God to the end of the world. The rule which God originally gave man for his conduct in life was, most certainly, a perfect rule, and calculated to promote universal happiness, as far as such a world, and such beings as we are, could admit of; and nothing was withheld from man which was suitable to his nature, and conducive to this end. Now, the belief of a future state of retribution being a very powerful incentive to virtue, we must suppose that the infinitely wise and good God did communicate this doctrine to mankind, and that it was a part of the religion of nature, which God originally impressed upon the human heart, or some other way communicated to the first parents of the human race, and which Christ revived and republished to the world. But, as I have said above, it is highly probable that no system of religion can be given to mankind which would make them all good and happy, unless it was attended with a power that would destroy their freedom, and make them a different sort of creatures from what they are at present. Mankind appear to be now what they have always been, and probably always will be,—some good and some bad, some wise and some foolish, some happy and some unhappy: and it farther appears to us, that this short period of our existence is only preparatory to a future one, where the wise and good will be rewarded, greatly above their desert, through the infinite mercy of God; and where the foolish and wicked will be punished, in such manner as God, in his most perfect wisdom, knows will be most productive of

happiness upon the whole. God punishes in the character of a parent, and, therefore, it is highly probable that he does it with an intention to reform, to cure, and, in the final event of things, to make all his intelligent creatures happy: for that the punishments of God cannot be eternal has, I hope, been shewn under the article Punishment; to which many other arguments might be added. But to return.

Secondly, I am to prove that the doctrine of a future state was originally taught mankind by God, from our natural feelings and desires. This argument I have touched upon under the article Contentment; to which I shall here add, that, if this were to be our only state of existence, we may reasonably suppose that God, who in infinite mercy placed us here, would have made it a state of greater happiness than it now, in general, appears to be; for, barely to give this life, under all its circumstances, without giving with it a prospect of a better, would be, to a great part of mankind, a gift unworthy of God, and inconsistent with infinite benevolence.

If we do but retain in our minds this truth, viz.—that God made man in order to render him, upon the whole, a happy being, we shall certainly conclude that he made him for some other state besides this. If this was to have been our only state of existence, all our concerns would properly have centred here, and it is highly probable we should have had no idea of any other; as such ideas would tend to lessen our attachment to this, and make us less anxious about our happiness here.

To implant, or indeed to permit, strong appre-



hensions of a future state to take place in the human mind, if there was no future state, would be inconsistent with divine wisdom and goodness; and the actions of men would, in some measure, be influenced and governed by a deception.

Thirdly and lastly, I am to prove the doctrine of a future state to be a branch of natural religion, and not peculiar to Christianity, from that knowledge of it which the sages of antiquity had, long before Christ made his appearance in the world.

The great Mr. Addison puts this sentiment into the mouth of Cato, who, on reading a tract which Plato had written on the immortality of the soul, appears to be convinced by his reasonings, and had his conviction strongly confirmed by his own natural feelings and desires, which are finely expressed in the following words:—"It must be so.—Plato, thou reason'st well:—else, whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire, this longing after immortality? Or whence this secret dread and inward horror of falling into nought? Why shrinks the soul back on herself, and startles at destruction? 'Tis the Divinity that stirs within us; 'tis Heaven itself that points out an hereafter, and intimates eternity to man."

Wise and considerate men have doubtless had, in all ages, such feelings, such desires, such longings after immortality; and from these, joined to their ideas of God, the contemplation of their own beings, and the apparent unequal distribution of happiness and misery in this life, they believed in a future state of retribution. Could all this be a deception, a lie? Surely

God would not permit his creatures to be thus deceived.

That able advocate for rational Christianity, Dr. Leland, agrees with me that the doctrine of a future state was believed and taught in the earliest ages of the world; and I am highly pleased that I can back my own opinion with the authority of so celebrated a writer. I am proud of being engaged in the same cause with him,—namely, that of vindicating rational Christianity; and still more so to find that, in general, we agree.

This judicious divine, in his justly-celebrated work lately published, under the title of “The Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation,” says, “That some notions of a future state did obtain among mankind from the earliest ages, and were probably a part of the primitive religion communicated to mankind by God himself; but that these traditions became gradually obscured.” See his chapter on a Future State, page 303, vol. ii. Again, in page 310, he says, “The most reasonable account which can be given of the early and universal spreading of the doctrine of a future state among the nations is, that it was part of the primitive religion, communicated to the first parents and ancestors of the human race, and which came originally by divine revelation, and was from them transmitted to their posterity.” In page 311, he says, “Since, therefore, it cannot be denied that some notions of a future state obtained very early in the world, and spread very generally among mankind; and since there is little likelihood

that men, in those first ages, came to the knowledge of it in the way of reasoning and abstracted speculation; it is most reasonable to resolve it into a primitive universal tradition, derived from the first ages."

In the Doctor's Preface to the second volume of this work, he says, "Some learned persons seem not willing to admit that the main principles of religion and morality were originally communicated by divine revelation to the first parents of mankind, and from them conveyed by tradition to their posterity."

Why this should not be admitted by the advocates of natural religion, I confess I know not: for, whatever way God took to make discoveries of himself to mankind, or to communicate to them a knowledge of the relation they stood in to him and to each other, and of the duties arising out of these relations, still, I think, it may, with great propriety, be styled a divine revelation. In whatever way God was pleased to reveal himself to our first parents, he certainly gave them a religion suited to their natures, and of which they could discover, by the use of their reason, that the practice would be conducive to their improvement in knowledge, in virtue, and in happiness; and this surely might be called a divine communication of natural religion. Even supposing that, with some Deists, we ascribe the knowledge of God, and the whole of our duty, to a due use of our rational faculties, and that mankind attained this knowledge by abstract reasoning and speculation; yet still, as



God is the author of those faculties, and we are obliged to him for the use of them, it may very properly be said that he originally communicated the knowledge of himself and of religion to mankind.

Whether the great Author of our beings originally impressed those ideas on the human heart; or whether he gave men reasoning powers, that they might contemplate his works, and so be naturally led up to a knowledge of their Maker, their relation, and their duties; still these must all be acknowledged to be divine revelation. Indeed, Lord Bolingbroke, in the fourth volume of his works, page 276, edit. 4th, calls it natural revelation, and says, "it produces a series of intuitive knowledge from the first principles to the last conclusions." For my part, I have every where supposed the law of nature to be the law of God, and the religion of nature the religion of God; and it appears to me to be a nice and unnecessary distinction.

I entirely agree with the learned Doctor Leland, "that there was an universal religion which had obtained from the beginning; and that it may be traced up to the first parents of the human race, to whom it was communicated by the wise Author of their beings," (page 82 and 83 of his first volume): to which I add, that the doctrine of a future state of retribution, with every thing else necessary or advantageous for mankind to know, was included in this original religion.

This learned divine farther allows, that this doc-

trine of a future state, which I am now considering, was believed and taught by Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and others. It appears that these three steadfastly believed the immortality of the soul ; and very few have doubted but that they did believe, as well as teach, it to be a thing of the greatest certainty. I think the Doctor has clearly shewn this in his work : and yet, in the same work, he says, that the best of them did not pretend to a full certainty about it. I am sorry when I am obliged to differ from this most excellent author : yet I must own that I think the uncertainty expressed by those philosophers was not about the real existence of the soul after death, but about the mode of its existence, and about the nature and extent of the rewards of good men in a future state ; and this appears to me even from a passage which the Doctor has produced to prove this uncertainty, (as to the soul's immortality). Plato represents Socrates as saying, " But know assuredly that I hope I am going to good men ; though this I would not take upon me peremptorily to assert : but that I shall go to the gods, this (if I can affirm any thing of this kind) I would certainly affirm." See page 345 of the Doctor's second volume.

This was a very modest and proper way of speaking about such things : and he intimates, in the conclusion of the same speech, that no man of understanding would be positive. Now, after all that was taught by Socrates concerning this doctrine, and the apparent belief of it which ran through his whole conduct, I think we may determine that he was un-

der no doubt about a future existence; but that he did not choose to affirm any thing particular as to the mode of that existence, or as to the nature and extent of future rewards.

Mr. Addison adopts the same modest method of speaking in the celebrated speech of Cato before mentioned; and yet, taking the whole of it together, it expresses a certainty of the soul's future existence, and a doubt only as to the mode of that existence.—“If there's a power above; and that there is, all nature cries aloud through all her works,” &c. He before appears to be quite convinced of the soul's immortality, from Plato's reasoning and his own feelings; and, in contemplating this eternal existence, he says, “Through what variety of untried beings, through what new scenes and changes, must we pass? The wide, th' unbounded, prospect lies before me: but shadows, clouds, and darkness, rest upon it:” as I believe they do with every man, even now, when he contemplates eternity. Cato, also, from a survey of the works of God, seems convinced that He must be a being who delights in virtue, and will reward it with happiness. “But when, or where?” Here his doubts were expressed; and, as if satisfied that the moment his soul was loosened from his body all these difficulties would be solved, he goes on, “This shall end them:” end all his doubts and conjectures as to the time, the place, the manner, of the soul's existence hereafter: as if he had said, I shall presently know the meaning of all these things which now appear so dark and obscure. I suppose that the



great Mr. Addison here intended to shew what he thought was the sense and opinion of the philosopher, when he represents him speaking in this manner; and from thence I have concluded that I have Mr. Addison's opinion in my favour. Upon the whole, there are very few authors, besides Doctor Leland, who represent Pythagoras, Socrates, or Plato, as under any doubt about the future existence of the soul. The learned Bishop of Gloucester acknowledges, that Socrates really believed not only the immortality of the soul, but also a state of future rewards and punishments. (*Div. Leg.* vol. ii. book iii. sect. 4, page 235, edit. 4th.) Be this as it may, I cannot see that this opinion at all opposes the Doctor's grand principle,—viz. the necessity and advantage of the Christian revelation. This I entirely agree in, as appears throughout the preceding work, and I shall more fully acknowledge it by and by. But, though I have the highest opinion of the Doctor's abilities, I am not ashamed to declare that, in some instances, I differ from him. This learned divine, in order to shew the great advantage of the Christian revelation, tells us, that Christians are not only certain of a future existence, but that the Gospel makes the fullest and clearest discoveries of the nature and extent of the future happiness. For my part, I hardly think it possible that adequate ideas of the happiness of spirits can be communicated to any human being; and, if we examine this subject, we shall find that our notions of it, under the Gospel, are to the full as obscure as those of the Heathen philosophers. Let us make the comparison from Doctor Leland himself.

We are told, in the New Testament, that there will be a future state of retribution, where the good will be rewarded, and where the wicked will be punished. This the learned Doctor allows to have been taught by Socrates and others. But farther; the Doctor, in order to prove that the Gospel makes a fuller and clearer discovery of the nature and greatness of future happiness than the world was ever favoured with before, says, (page 447, vol. ii.) "It is not only represented as a state of rest, in which good men shall be absolutely exempted from all the evils and sorrows to which they are now obnoxious, but as including the full perfection of our nature, in the enjoyment of all that good which is necessary to our complete felicity." Socrates also says, (as quoted by the Doctor, page 346, vol. ii.) "The soul, at its departure hence, goes into a place like itself, noble, pure, invisible; to a wise and good God." And again he says, that "the soul which gives itself up to the study of wisdom and philosophy, and lives abstracted from the body," (meaning, no doubt, every wise and virtuous man who properly governs his sensual appetites,) "goes, at death, to that which is like itself, divine, immortal, wise; to which when it arrives, it shall be happy, freed from error, ignorance, fears, disorderly loves, and other human evils; and live, as is said of the initiated, the rest of its life with the gods." Here, I think, Socrates's idea suffers very little by the comparison. The Doctor then proceeds to shew that it is clearly discovered in the Gospel, "that the body shall also go to heaven and be immortal; that the whole man, body and soul united, shall enjoy a state

of felicity and perfection." By the body, here, the Doctor must be understood to mean the same body which the soul animated in this life. But surely this doctrine is not clearly revealed in the New Testament: if it was, so many disputes could not have arisen about it between learned and good Christians. The great Mr. Locke does not seem to think such an union at all necessary, if possible; others think that St. Paul's arguments, in the xvth chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, all tend to prove that the same body will not be raised; and we are farther told in Scripture, "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven."

The Doctor proceeds, and tells us, "that the souls of good men shall be placed in delightful mansions;"\* page 450: and, in page 347, he represents Socrates as saying, "that they who live holy and excellent lives, being freed from these earthly places, as from prisons, ascend to a pure region above the earth, where they dwell: and those of them, who were sufficiently purged by philosophy, live all their time without bodies, and ascend to still more beautiful habitations." But, to carry the advantage of the Gospel intelligence still higher, in page 451 he says, "But the Gospel raiseth our ideas of the heavenly felicity still higher, by assuring us that we shall then be admitted to the beatific vision and fruition of God himself. 'Blessed are the pure in heart,' says our Saviour, 'for they shall see God.'" However, the

\* If there are no bounds to space, where then can those delightful mansions be situated? or do they range unlimited throughout the profundity of all space?—EDITOR.



Doctor owns, in this place, that we cannot clearly understand what is meant by seeing God. Socrates speaks “of going to a wise and good God, and of living with the Gods,” as was shewn above. Upon the whole, it appears that we, under the Gospel, can no more have adequate ideas of the happiness of heaven than many of the philosophers had: indeed, it is impossible we should, if it be true that it is such “as eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor can it ever enter into the heart of man to conceive.” This, indeed, is sufficient to put a stop to all our inquiries about it.

The same may be said of future punishments; the figurative representations of which, in the New Testament, have so confused the ideas of some good Christians, that they have been led to believe there will be a *local hell*, and that *real* fire and brimstone will be the lot of sinners throughout an endless eternity:—a doctrine inconsistent with reason, and with all our ideas of infinite perfection; “for who can dwell with everlasting burnings?” Surely it will be allowed that even Pythagoras’s doctrine of transmigration is as consistent with our ideas of an infinitely wise and good God, as the supposing that he would suffer a poor creature, whose happiness he originally intended, and for which end he created him, to lie eternally in burning sulphur, and to be the companion of devils. Upon the whole, the mode of our existence hereafter, and the nature and extent of future rewards and punishments, appear to be as much unknown to us now, and must ever remain unknown, as they were to the philosophers of old; and I think we

may rationally suppose that the doctrine of a future state of retribution, with every other useful doctrine and precept of the New Testament, was originally taught by God in the religion of nature, which, being a perfect religion, must contain every thing necessary for man to know : and, though it might be republished and restored to its original purity, and was so, by Jesus Christ, yet we cannot suppose that it could admit of improvement ; this being inconsistent with our ideas of perfection.

The subject of this chapter properly ends here :—but, as I have just now read the Doctor's late much-admired performance, I cannot resist an inclination to make some farther remarks upon it, and particularly on the part relative to the religion of the Jews, of which the Doctor speaks as follows, in the contents of the nineteenth chapter of his second volume. "The Jewish revelation was originally designed to give a check to the growing idolatry, and had a tendency to spread the knowledge and worship of the one true God among the nations, and it actually had that effect in many instances." If this be really the case, I have made a wrong representation of the Jewish religion in the preceding work ; and this, I own, is my principal reason for examining it here.

Whatever might originally be the design of the Jewish institution, the event by no means proves that any considerable check was given by it to the growing idolatry, or that it gave the nations round about such amiable ideas of the God of the Jews, as would tend to promote his worship : on the contrary, their religion represented God in a light the most unlikely to

raise in the minds of men that ardent affection for him which would consequently produce a rational and acceptable worship of him. The Jews appear to have themselves had very mean, low, and absurd, notions of God: and the nations round them were much more likely to learn to fear or hate, than to love and adore, a God who had arbitrarily chosen, from among the rest of his offspring, a people who were inspired with the most cruel sentiments for the rest of mankind; and who fathered upon their God cruelties and barbarities greater, perhaps, than were practised, either before or since, by any people under heaven. This *cruel, revengeful, persecuting*, spirit might make some hypocrites, but, we may venture to affirm, very few real converts to Judaism; and could have but little tendency towards “spreading the knowledge and worship of the one true God among the nations.” But the cruel and bloody persecutions of the Jews should, by no means, have been charged upon God: nothing sure could be more affronting to the Divine Majesty, the kind Parent of the universe, “who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works!” Why the God of mercy and compassion, who could have no motive (conceivable by us) for bringing creatures into being but to make them happy, who is “slow to anger, and abounding in goodness,” should be represented as dealing destruction among his creatures, cutting off in the most cruel manner men, women, children,—nay, even the useful and surely innocent cattle,—is to me very extraordinary, was a height of blasphemy that no other nation ever arrived at, and can, I think, be



accounted for but one way,—namely, from the wrong notions which the Jews were taught by their priests to entertain of God. They, in general, believed that he loved them only, and hated all the rest of mankind: now, if they really believed that God hated all mankind besides themselves, they naturally supposed that those whom God hated could not be too cruelly dealt with, and that such treatment of them would be pleasing to him.\* I say, that the bulk of the Jews might believe such absurdities, and indulge such blasphemous notions of the Divine Being; but whether their great lawgiver could thus believe, I leave others to determine. It is sufficient for my purpose here to shew, that the Jewish religion could hardly have the tendency which Dr. Leland supposes, of “spreading the knowledge and worship of the one true God.” It surely does not appear to be calculated to give mankind just notions of God and of his attributes, or to encourage pure and rational worship. Power seems to be almost the only attribute of the Deity known to the Jews themselves; and fear seems to be the sole motive of their worship. Such knowledge, and such worship, they indeed took very effectual methods to spread among the nations; but that God intended thus to make himself known will, with many, remain a doubt.†

\* It is upon this same principle that the church of Rome, calling itself Christian, in opposition to the Jewish church, has acted from the very earliest period of Christianity. Oh! Priestcraft, what injuries, what evils, what cruelties, hast thou not caused in all ages and in all countries.—EDITOR.

† With the wise and reflecting part of mankind there can remain no doubt on the subject.—EDITOR.

If the religion of the Jews was intended to be a check to the growing idolatry, as the Doctor supposes, it was so far from having the desired effect, that the Jews themselves became idolators; and Aaron, their high-priest, appears to have encouraged them in it: for, while Moses was in the mount, “he made them a calf, fashioning it with a graving-tool, built an altar before it, made a proclamation, and said, To-morrow is a feast to the Lord.” *Exod. xxxii. 4, 5.* Accordingly, the people came and sacrificed to the calf which Aaron had made; probably in imitation of one of the Egyptian deities. It may be said that this was done contrary to an absolute command in their religion: yet it will at least serve to prove that their religion did not give the vulgar Jews just and proper notions of the one true God. From the manner of Moses’s and Aaron’s application to God, their frequent conversations with him, his particular residence in the ark, and his visible appearances in a pillar of smoke by day and fire by night; I say, from all these, the vulgar Israelites might naturally conclude that their God was a *local visible* God, like the gods of the Egyptians, and that he was only concealed from their sight by Moses and the *priest*. Moses’s intimacy with God operated very strongly on their fears, and while he was with them all was well, or was soon made so; but forty days’ absence of Moses and of God put them out of all patience; and accordingly we see that they applied to Aaron, and said, “Up, make us gods which shall go before us: for, as for this Moses, the man that brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of

him." *Exod. xxxii. 1.* The people concluded that they had lost both Moses and their God, and, therefore, wanted to have another made. This surely shews that their religion was not calculated to give them just and proper notions of the one true God, or to encourage a rational and acceptable worship of him.—Here I cannot help remarking the infinite superiority of the religion of Christ over that of Moses: and yet we are taught to believe them both to be of divine authority and designation, and the one to depend upon the other.

But to return to Aaron, who, without remonstrance or advice, immediately complied with the people's request, and told them that, if they would bring him their gold, he would make them a god; which he accordingly did, as before mentioned. To excuse this base compliance in God's high-priest, some have thought that the people insisted upon his doing it, and that he was afraid. This, however, does not appear to be the case; but, if it was, it would only prove that his notions of the true God must be as defective as those of the vulgar. His faith in the one true God must be weak indeed, if, for fear of the people, he would set up another, after experiencing so many signal deliverances from Egyptian cruelty! Others have thought that Aaron might have other motives: but, without entering into these, I shall only observe, that, if Aaron had been instructed by his religion to have just and proper notions of God and his attributes, he certainly would have endeavoured to enlighten the minds of the people, and to reason them out of such absurd ideas of the supreme



Being. Moses, however, though the meekest man on earth, was so very angry, or, in the words of the text (Exod. xxxii. 19), his “anger waxed so hot, that he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.” Yet we do not find that Aaron was much blamed for this act of rebellion against the true God: on the contrary, Moses gave his brother a very mild reproof, saying (v. 21), “What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?” Here, indeed, he is charged with bringing a great sin upon the people, by his mean and wicked compliance with their request: but yet the people only appear to be punished; for it is said (v. 35), “And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf which Aaron made.” Many remarks might be made upon Aaron’s conduct in the affair of the molten calf:\* however, I shall make but one, which is, that this instance of Aaron will serve to justify an observation I have repeatedly made in the foregoing work,—namely, that, in the early ages of the world, *priests* began to lead the vulgar into error, and to give them false notions of God and religion; and that this was the first step they took in order to raise their own power and influence.

To teach men moral virtue does not appear to have been the business of priests in any age or country.

\* In the xxth verse of the above-quoted chapter it is said, “And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strewed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it.” From this process of Moses’s, some have been led to think that there was a deception as to the material of which this calf was made; such process being altogether inconsistent with the nature of gold.

Mr. Locke says, in his Reasonableness of Christianity, that “the Pagan priests made it not their business to teach men virtue:” and, according to Varro, they were employed only to instruct the people what gods they were to worship, what sacrifices they were to offer, and the like.

In many places, the women prostituted themselves as an act of religion; and this has never been ascribed to any particular wantonness in the women, but to the villainy of the *priests*. Thus were the natural notions which mankind had of God and religion very early corrupted. I will not assert that this was the only source of the corruption of natural religion: but I must think that it was a principal one; and I shall venture to add, that to the same cause we may ascribe all the corruptions of the pure religion of Christ and his apostles, in the Protestant as well as the Romish churches. Virtue now seems to be the least part of the business of the priest: to teach men how to *believe* is the principal. The same may be said of *missionaries* in general: to make men Christians seems to be all their concern; while the social virtues are so totally neglected, that a very melancholy observation has been frequently made, and I fear with some truth, that the new converts to Christianity become worse men than they were before. They are taught how to *believe*, but not how to *practise*.

I hope to be excused this digression; but, before I entirely quit the subject, I think it necessary to declare that, by the term *priests*, I do not mean the clergy in general; many of whom I reverence, as

worthy, honest, learned, and good, men, whose labours and examples tend to promote piety, justice, benevolence, and all the other natural and Christian virtues. By priests, I would willingly be understood to mean true, genuine, high-priests, who are the same in all religions and in all countries ; who, forgetting the example of the meek and humble Jesus, proudly “ lord it over God’s heritage,” looking on themselves as the governors, guides, and directors, of the consciences of the laity in all their religious concerns ; who impose *canons* and *creeds*, and damn all those who will not assent to them. Such dispositions and principles, how well soever they may suit the spirit and character of the Romish church, are surely inconsistent with the religion of Protestants. Such men as these were of old the corrupters of natural religion ; such men as these are now corrupters of the pure and genuine religion of Christ, or the religion of nature restored by him to its original purity.

I now return to Doctor Leland : and, as I have shewn in some few instances wherein I differ from this celebrated author, I shall here, with much more pleasure, acknowledge wherein we agree ; and then conclude this work.

This excellent writer says, “ that a divine revelation was highly expedient, if not absolutely necessary, at the advent of Christ. He observes, that man, in his original constitution and the design of his Creator, is formed capable of religion ; that, at his first formation, he was not left to work out a scheme of religion for himself, but received all necessary instructions from God ; the knowledge of whom derived from the



first parents of the human kind to their posterity, through the channel of tradition. He observes, farther, that the corruption of religion in the Heathen world is no just objection against the wisdom and goodness of divine Providence. God, he says, did not leave himself without witness among the Heathens : they had for a long time some remains of ancient tradition, originally derived from revelation. They had the standing evidences of a Deity in his wonderful works ; but they sunk into gross idolatry before the time of Moses. The Doctor proceeds thus : —“ Mere human wisdom and philosophy were certainly insufficient to cure this evil ; a revelation from God was the only effectual remedy : the Christian revelation is suited to the necessities of mankind ; it was published to the world in the fittest season, and was attended with the most convincing evidence of a divine original. We should be very thankful for the salutary light it brings, and be careful to improve it.” And again he says, “ that the principal heads of moral duty were made known to mankind from the beginning, and continued to be known and acknowledged in the patriarchal ages : but that, when men fell from the right knowledge of God, they also fell, in important instances, from the right knowledge of moral duty : that the nations were actually sunk into so deplorable a state of corruption, with regard to morals, at the time of our Saviour’s appearing, that one principal end of the manifestation of Jesus Christ was to recover them from their wretched and guilty state to holiness and happiness : that the Gospel scheme of morality exceeds whatsoever had been published to the

world;\* that its precepts are enforced by the most powerful and important motives; and that their tendency to promote the practice of holiness and virtue is an argument to prove the divinity of the Christian revelation." In all this I most cordially agree with this judicious divine: and whoever reads the foregoing work will perceive that I have all along spoken to the same purpose, though I am conscious of having done it with much less learning, accuracy, and elegance.

I wish I had been happy enough to have read the Doctor's work before I had nearly finished my own: I should probably have been more positive in some of my sentiments, and less so in others; yet I have the satisfaction to declare that I find no reason from it absolutely to alter any of them.

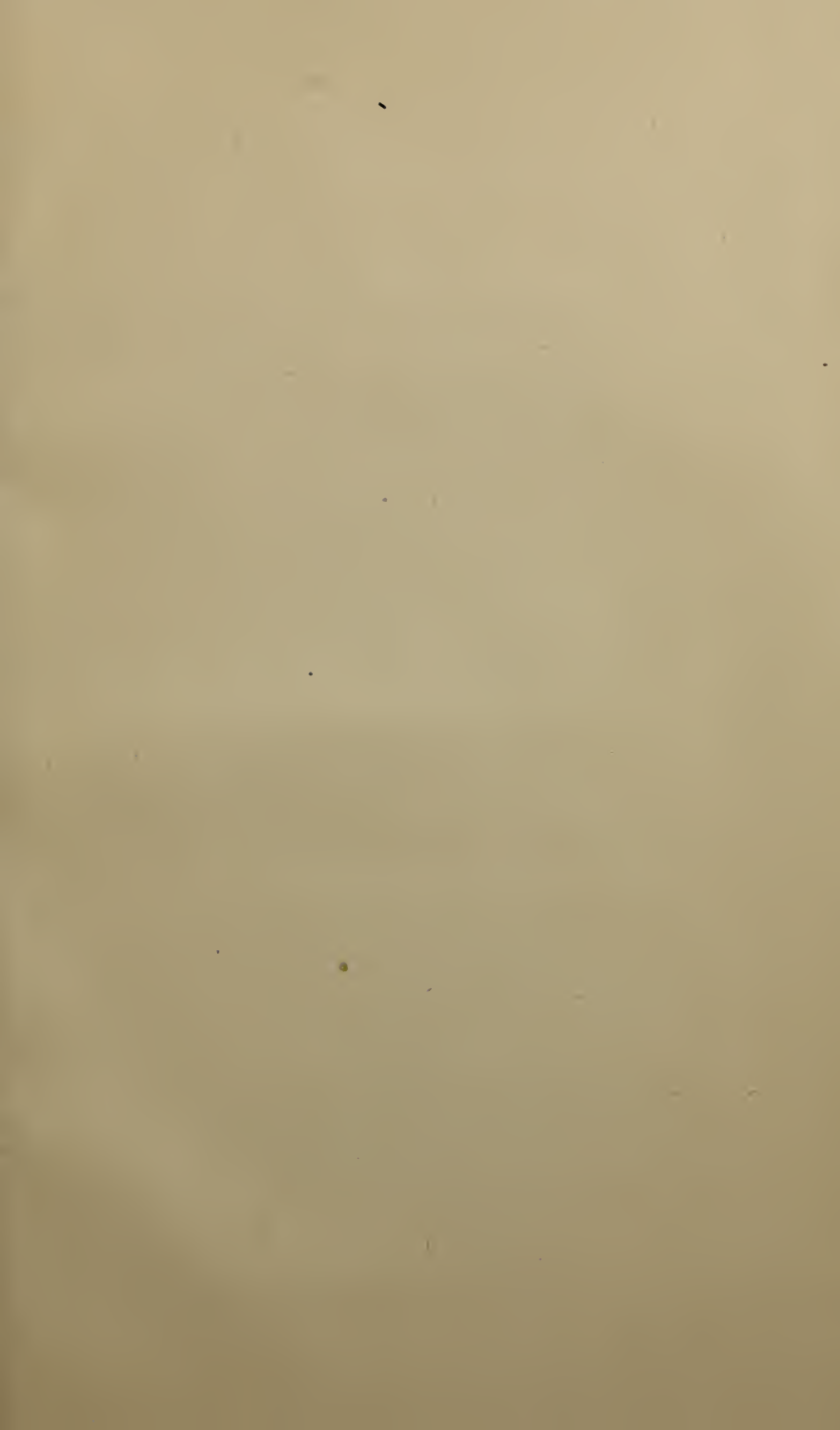
\* There does not appear to be any thing new in the Christian system of morality; it being only a republication of the religion of nature and reason, intelligible to all mankind, and such as had been taught by the ancient philosophers of every age and country.  
—EDITOR.

THE END.









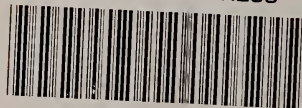
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